RPG REVIEW

Issue #7, March 2010

Interview With Russell Bailey.. Preceptor Designer's Notes ... Warhammer Third Edition … Rolemaster & Spacemaster Dark Space ... Cthulhu Delta Green Congo Crisis ... My Life With Boss … The Mechanics of Fear and Madness … Avatar Review ... Industry News

Table of Contents

ADMINISTRIVIA

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EDITORIAL

OK, so this one issue of *RPG Review* is quite late. As an explanation, rather than an excuse, the author of a key article had to submit material for another project that was far more important than our little 'zine. I have the humblest apologies for our artist Jensen who submitted his work quite some time ago, and Mingshi Wu who has been sitting on some very hot gossip for a few weeks.

A particular emphasis on this issue is on horror in rpgs. In a broader sense this includes the review by Stephen Justice of the latest version of Warhammer FRP, "the grim world of perilous adventure" as the cover one blared at me. I have taken the opportunity to follow suit with the Crotlive Convergence, a novella length game which I ran many years ago. *Dark Space* remains an under-rated and sadly near-forgotten component of the Rolemaster and Spacemaster line. This will probably be the one and only article about said setting that will grace the pages of RPG Review; and the only other mention I know of was a great article in Challenge magazine #55 in 1991 entitled 'Soul Pirates'. Yet it seems that *Dark Space* still has a few fans about..

Mike Daumen provides a superb setting, plot summary and support for a Delta Green Call of Cthulhu game based in on the Congo Crisis, "the horror, the horror" indeed! Also on theme, but *very* tangentially is Dan Lestrage's version of My

Life With Master scenario which was run at the most recent KapCon in Wellington, New Zealand – which is a *great* convention it must be said; what they lack in numbers they certainly make up in enthusiasm and organisation. Also following suit is this issue's theory article, this time looking at the mechanics of fear, horror and madness in some of the bigger horror rpg systems to grace our shelves; Call of Cthulhu, Chill, the various World of Darkness games, GURPS Horror, AD&D's Ravenloft, Kult, Little Fears and Trail of Cthulhu. This is neatly supplemented by this issue's interview with Russell Bailey, a young and prolific author who shows a very firm grasp on the concept of horror. What I'm supposed to make of Erica Hoehn's contribution of "Old Cthulhu Had A Farm" is anyone's guess. It rates up there with other fannish tunes such as "Cthulhu Sleeps Tonight", "The Lair of Great Cthulhu" and "Hark! The Nameless Cultists Sing".

Of course, each issue of RPG Review does not concentrate exclusively on one genre. Alex Greene provides a thought-provoking article of a game design in development aimed for beginners. Karl Brown, with assistance from Liz Bowman, continues to explore the near future with GURPS. Keith Ealanata's Drusto, a halfling with a fondness for rabbits, is the featured NPC for this issue (and with stats in three game systems!) stands as a stark juxtaposition to the above content – although a horror angle could be point on that as well, if one so wished. Andrew Moshos provides a review of the very well-received film *Avatar*, which contains both beauty and horror in its own right. Does Steve Saunder's regular reports from Orcus count as horror? I always thought Demogorgon was scarier myself... It just goes to show that you can have horror and fear almost everywhere... nowhere is safe, because you cannot escape the mind...

OK, so I'm typing this in a former 19th century mental asylum, which has more than a few stories of its own... The sky overhead is grey, the grounds are sparse and open, but surrounded by natural bushland, a chaotic winding river, walls and fences designed to keep people in, there are many nooks and crannies, bats fly overhead here, and crows let out their mournful craw...

Sleep tight,

Lev Lafayette, lev@rpgreview.net

LETTERS

Torg: A Response (and Rejoiner)

> Lev,

Hi Phil,

> nice to see that Torg's name is still out there! However, I'm sorry to
> say I'm not a huge fan of the article, which feels very dry and would, IMHO, benefit from more "pointing" for > the reader with headings and introductions.

The Purloined Letter.

That's probably a fair comment. I am a 'dry' writer by nature and inclination (ergo, I quite like Greg Gordon's work). Pointers however are always good.

> I also disagree strongly with some of yoru conclusions. The Axiom scale does not represent the net worth of a
> realm, so the fact that one realm only adds up to 38 and another to 71 does not have any impact on game
> balance whatsoever.

I must disagree with this as the axioms define what is possible in a realm. Of course, with many years of play one could internalise these limits and end up not notice them on a conscious level, but they are still there.

> The axiom is a key part of defining the feel and genre of that realm. Artificially changing axioms as youi have
> done fundamentally changes how those realms will play.

Yes, and those with radical changes were marked as such. I am aware of this.

> Furthermore, at a metaphysical level, you need to go back and recreate that realm - if you're going to give the
> Living Land a magic axiom, you need to put in magical traditions for the Living Land, and explain how these
> are reconciled with the deterministic religious state where all things come from Lanala. It really makes no
> sense at all. And that's me being polite!!

Sure, that's true is well. I don't have a problem with that. The objective was "a greater degree of balance within the settings", for those who desire such things.

> In describing interpersonal skills, I think you've missed two of the most important elements. One, the
> emphasis on "non-combat" interactions on the drama deck meaning that the system actively encourages
> combat actions that are more than just attack and defend. Second, that the interpersonal system works equally
> AGAINST the PCs as it does for them, forcing players to think hard and roleplay hard whenever they're in a
> social situation. This, while not unique, is a feature that is core to the game's goal of having rules enforce genre
> convention. Not universally popular, as a concept this is still controversial even now (I could reference some
> debates on the Hero Systems board just this year on the same issue!)

OK, that can be cause for elaboration.

> Your reference to the Glass Jaw Ninja is accurate, but your proposed solution is not, unless you adjust values
> of armour, weapons and toughness across the game. There are other solutions around though, so I'm sure we
> could find some web references if you're interested!

I honestly don't think the modifications you suggest are necessary, but please elaborate if you like.

> I'm not sure why you think the lighter style of the GM book is a negative. Certainly that's the implication of
> what you write. To me, it was a positive, and made it a very readable text - and one of the better "How to
> GM" guides that I've read (an honourable mention here to D&D3.5 DMG as well).

I like a good content substance to word count, thus light writing isn't my thing. Especially when a lot of the material is already in the main book.

> I'd like to know what you meant when you say the game "diverges from well-known conventions". I would

> think that, particular in the 21st century RPG world of indie games, there are no longer any true conventions
> in the RPG world.

It certainly did then, and it does - to at least 95% of the industry - now.

> I'd also debate the point about high level of randomness relative to the scale. The die roll, while a d20, actually
> clusters quite tightly, so that most rolls will only give a -2 to +2 variance.

I disagree with you here, a d20 doesn't cluster.

> I'm also not sure you've got your RPG genealogy right. I think Torg came out when crunch was perhaps just
> past it's peak, but it certainly didn't come out at a time when rules light was starting to dominate, which I'd
> argue was later in the 90s.

**"It came out at a time when the fashion was increasingly towards simpler mechanics and a rules-light
approach" was the quote in question.**

Well let's have a look at what were the big, fashionable up-and-coming games at the time.

**Cyberpunk 2020 (definitely towards simple mechanics and rules light) Rifts (OK, you got me there) Amber
(rules light and simple mechanics) Vampire (again simpler mechanics) Shadowrun (more conventional and
easier mechanics.. but more broken as well!)**

> 1. Too many "essential" rules were in the supplements, meaning Gms required (or at least, they felt they
> required) to make a big investment to play the game. This was certainly true of me. I didn't run a game of
> Torg until I had all the cosm sourcebooks, just in case there was stuff in there I "needed" to know. As it
> happens, this isn't true, but references to forthcoming supplements in the Torg boxed set reinforced this
> suspicion.

True that. It means a game tends towards a smaller and smaller group of more dedicated fans.

> 2. The metaplot was hard to sustain and inevitably lead either to divergences or to static campaigns as they
> waited for the next supplement, and

Or.. throw it to the wind!

> 3. White wolf came along and blew the RPG world apart with their darker gothic vision, against which Torg's
> largely cinematic / four-colour feel and style quickly became extremely unfashionable.

Yes, that too; "...and with a grittier feel (e.g., Cyberpunk)"

> 1. Ayle - I can't see reference to the Light/Dark dichotomy which is fundamental to how this genre operates.

Well, I mentioned it (albeit in passing) in the first line and iirc in the editorial..

> 2. Supplements you don't have - it's hardly a comprehensive review then!

It is entitled "An Almost Complete Collection". As it turns out the ratio is about 1/3 that I don't have.. I kept discovering more as I was writing it (especially those towards the end of the series)!

> However, I'd suggest that the length of commentary on the supplements you DON'T have is probably nearer
> the length that your comments on the supplements you DO have should be.

I'd suggest that's way off the mark; 5,108 words versus 879. Marginally over 1/6th.

> Hope you take my criticism in a positive light. We Torgians are not known for our diplomacy skills and I've
> seen few e-fights like the ones we've managed to generate on this list. But my comments are meant in a helpful
> way, and are based on my many years of Torg experience as well as my job as a professional writer (albeit that
> I write business reports and such like!!)

> Phil Dack

No problem; I do a lot of writing (some of it published, even) myself. I'll incorporate some of the suggestions you've made.

All the best,

Lev

Cookie-Cutter Fantasy Worlds

Hi Lev,

Thank you again for another excellent issue, and for encouraging depth of thought. The editorial touched on some good points regarding cookie-cutter fantasy worlds that result from a general lack of perception of mythic and cultural elements. You could say that these are the product of an RPG thought terminating clique that claims mind after unquestioning mind.

While on a topic of this nature, the book "Bendable Learnings" by Don Watson, might be of interest.

Dale Long, Adelaide, SA.

That's a very interesting suggestion Dale; I am more familiar with Watson's work a speech-writer and his criticism of what he pithily calls "weasel words" so commonly used in politics and especially management. The suggestion that 'cookie-cutter' fantasy comes from unquestioning minds is something that Greg Stafford certainly suggested as well in the interview. Many have forgotten how to think according to the place and time of their characters and instead of having an enjoyable, challenging and educational gaming session it is blithely relegated to the background to "fun".

HOT GOSSIP INDUSTRY NEWS

by Wu Mingshi

Hosei bo Mr. Lev,

Today I receive email from Dr. Saleem Zakaraia of Bank of Africa, country "West Africa". He offer large sum of money to help him smuggle money out of his country that doesn't exist, very naughty and lots of money. So I act blur and sah-kah him out. Let us see where this goes, and what sabo Mingshi can do, la? Will report back next quartering. Mingshi only mention because this quartering she no receive special letters from fan crowd, only mail from spies in field and most of time they want send special code message like numbers station. *"Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot... Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot"* .. it drone over over again, like People Action Party.

They get special mention again in my column, Minister Cynthia Phua talk cock and say women should take more caution when choosing husband, because if divorce happen, bad husband maybe not pay maintenance for children on time. Thiam! If husband not pai ka in first place then divorce not happen! Minster all mong cha cha, sometime I think that my island home government either very very idiot, but little smarter than people who vote for them! Aiyah!

OK, I sorry. I do industry news now..
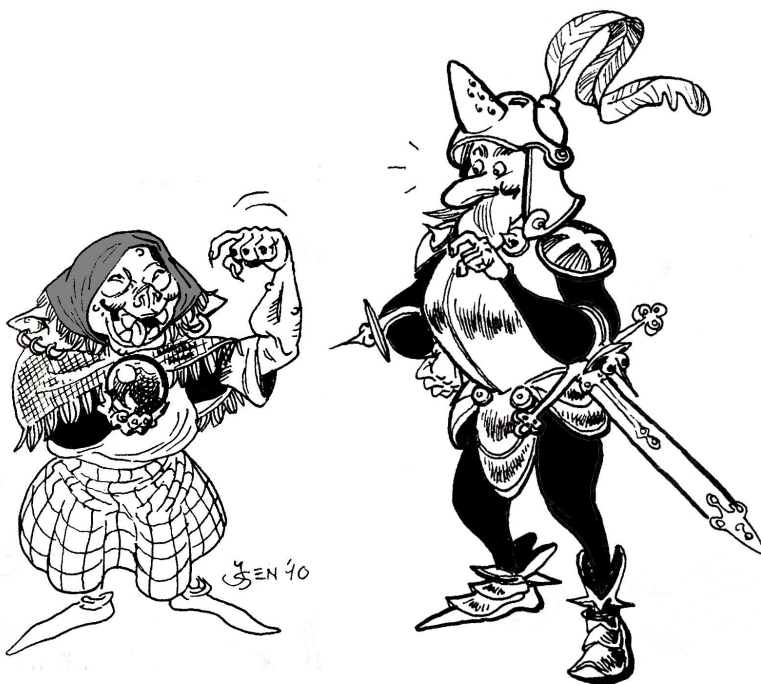
Our friends at Cubicle 7 Entertainment making new game based on Laundry series using Basic Role Playing engine. First Minshi think this game of dhobi, perhaps based in her island home, but no, actually books, the Atrocity Archive, The Jennifer Morgue and The Fuller Memorandum. The Laundry is special British mata people who stop alien gods invading the planet. Which is always important, is it?

Also, you do special issue on horror, so here some horror news. New game written by Ashok Desai, which sound like Indian name, called *Bogeyman*, with very scary artwork by Dan Verkys, a card-based system, and theme of personal horror. Characters suffer physical and mental damage, have impulses and nerve, proficiencies for skills and attributes of Power, Grace, Intellect and Spirt. Deluxe hardback edition

available!

The Wizards of the Coast have been busy bringing out many new big fourth edition Dungeons & Dragons books for our shelves. Recently they have been off earth. Coming soon is "The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea", it has angels, devils, githyanki (ooh!), and astral galeons. Any space left for PCs? Maybe if they want to be demigod, lah!

Perhaps similar our good friend The Chaosium bring out "Strange Aeons II: Nine Forays In Unusual Time and Places", which is Call of Cthulhu in history – and even prehistory, include Cthulhu monsters against cavemen! Should go well with Cthulhu Invictus supplements (Cthulhu in Ancient Rome) and especially free material that The Chaosium put on their website.

Mingshi likes games to be fun, but sometimes world of business gets in the way. Money root all evil, except for the evil that cultists have when they think Cthulhu protect them if they put little babies on altar with big knife. A little bird whisper in her ear and say that Catalyst Game Labs (BattleTech, Shadowrun, Eclipse Phase, CthulhuTech) have money trouble because a boss-man 'borrow' some money - some people saying more than three-quarts of a million. Lots of money! Curse of CthuluTech continues!

Another story, what happen to Eoris? It was looking pretty and some people spend many dollars to preorder. Then *whoosh* - all gone! Someone have big eye power there. Vapourware gaming! Facebook fan page has angry fans. Website now "under construction", more like "deconstruction", lah! Ha! Mingshi make postmodern joke.. OK, not very funny, some people spend money and receive no book.
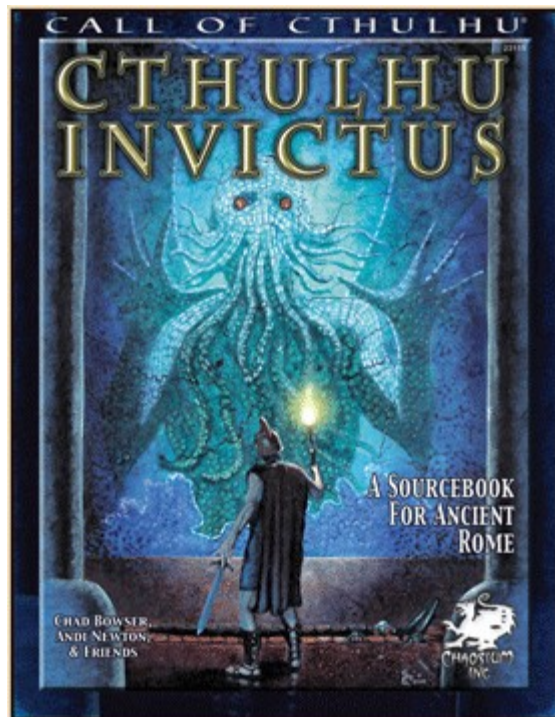
New supplement for White Wolf's Scion is coming, named Yazata: The Persian Gods and it's all about .. Persian Gods. I mention this for you, Mister Lev, I know you like all that mythology and old gods stories.. Why you not play Scion?

[Ed: Minshi, I honestly don't have a good answer for that one... I guess I'd better give it a go one day..]

All for me this quartering!

Love, Mingshi! mingshi@rpgreview.net

WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY 3RD EDITION REVIEW

by Stephen Justice

For those of you who might be interested in the new rules for WHFRP I thought I might share how things went when I ran a once off last night with a couple of friends. I'll mostly be doing this by comparing it to aspects of the 2nd edition so that people who have had experience with that game can relate.

Now first off I'd like to state that my two friends and I were all impressed with the new system. We all went into it skeptical and I especially felt sure that I wouldn't like it after what I had read of the rules, but to my surprise I very soon became more and more impressed. In fact it looks like this once off might end up as a campaign.

This first section will be on character creation. The new character creation is even faster then the one in second edition. It still has some random elements for those that like them, but that is mostly optional for what career you end up starting with. There is a decent deck of starting careers and you shuffle them, hand 3 out and then choose one. Race is chosen with an optional rule to randomize if you so wish.

At this point I should also mention they've dropped Halfling in favor of splitting Elf's into two categories. This means the new starting races (until supplements are released) are Human, Dwarf, High Elf and Wood Elf.

For the rest of character creation it's done by point buy, no more random stats so one person ends up better then anyone else. You can use your starting points to buy up stats, wealth, skills, talent cards or action cards. Each is evenly worth it depending on how you want to play your character so any type of character is possible starting off.

Wealth of course just changes how much gear and money you start with.

Skills changes how many skills you can choose to start with trained from your starting career, higher levels lets you have a specialty or two.

Talent cards let you choose talents from 1 of 3 decks. This is important as a character can only support having so many talents from each type of deck at a time. They fall into Reputation (social), Focus (mental) and Tactic (combat) talents.

Action cards are special tricks you can pull of if the situation matches that on the card. In encounters (combat or social) you can only use one action card a turn. This could be your basic melee attack, a prayer, a spell or a winning smile (which one of my players used quite a lot). Some have recharge times so special actions can only be used every so often.

After that the last thing left is choosing the party card. This determines what general bonus the party gets, what sort of talent cards they can share and how big the party tension limit is. There are also party attributes which can determine how others see then first up. Be it a group of 'Brash Young Fools', 'Honor Bound Knights', 'Scoundrels' or one of many others there is something to suit almost any play style.

All in all I'm impressed with where they went with the new character creation. They've kept the fun of random careers while still allowing some choice, but they've removed the part where one starting character can have a random advantage over another. The points allow you to customize your character a lot more and the final party sheet allows the group to set the mood of how the game will be.

I don't like how they've limited some of the character choices, there only being 3 collages of magic or 3 religious orders you can choose from for example, but it looks like they might be expanding on that later. They've also only got rules for each of the races form one area each, the humans for example 'must' come from Reikland, and while you can feel free to ignore this rule it looks like they'll release rules for other character from elsewhere later on.

This means that they're setting it up for that you must get the expansions they release in order to get the complete game. Now while I personally don't mind getting the expansions I can't see everyone in the same boat. Personally to get most people interested I think the $150 for the core set should have included enough to cover at least the entire empire and not just one small area

Here I'm going to do a quick run down of how the game handles challenges, whether it is social, combat or something else entirely.

Now for those that played 2nd edition I'm sure they'll all remember that in most cases to do something consisted of 1 roll, 2 if opposed and 3 if in combat. The first roll was to get under the characters skill %, the second if contested was does the opponent get more under his skill % and the 3rd was a 1d10 damage roll.
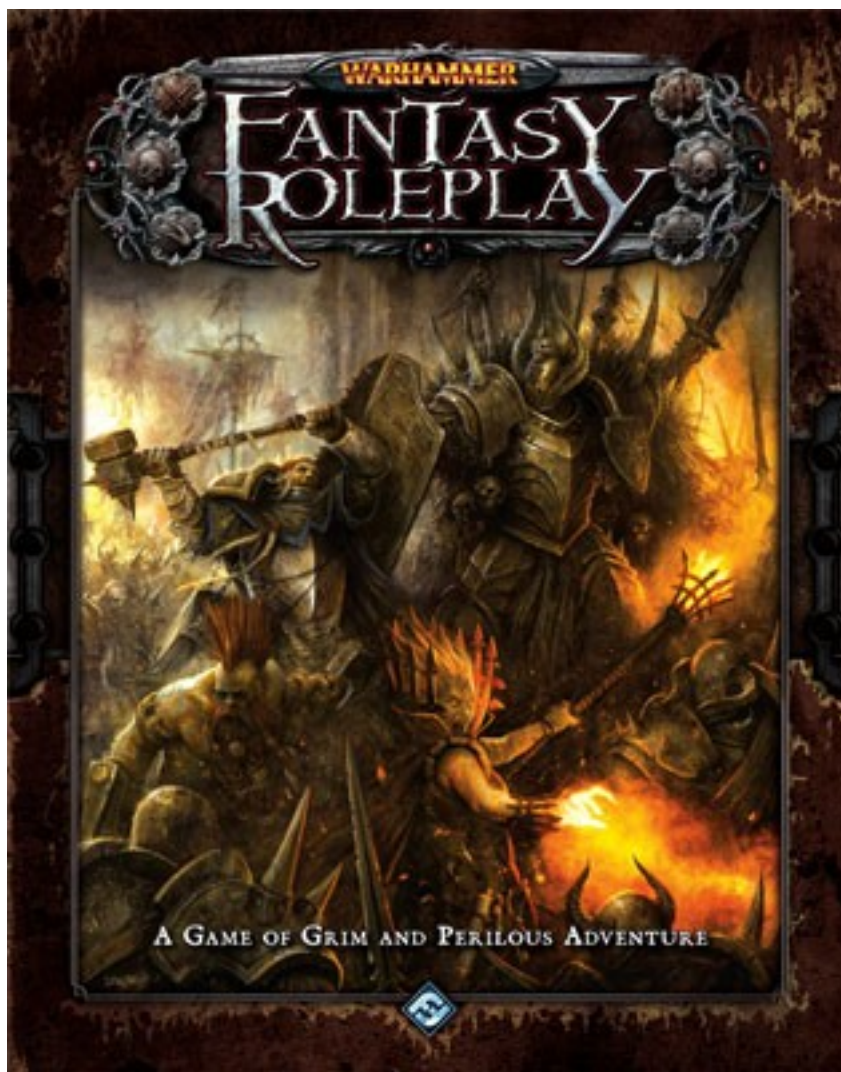
In 3rd edition they've reduced it all to one dice roll no matter the situation. Now remember they use custom dice of different colours. Each colour represents something different and has different symbols on it. Each symbol has a different effect on a test and this means there are ways to still have a success but suffer negative effects and vice-versa.

For a basic test you get dice for your attributes, dice for relevant skills and challenge dice depending on how hard the task is. Challenge dice have symbols that can cancel out successes. If the task is especially hard you can get misfortune dice which can really make things go wrong if you roll badly.

For a contested test you take your same pool, but the challenge depends on your opponent's relevant attribute and their skill in the area. This covers combat and non-combat areas. I'll cover combat itself later as it's quite deadly.

The only thing that changes with your dice pool is your attribute dice are traded for stance dice depending on where your character is on the conservative or reckless track. Stance dice offer better chances for success, but there are only so many you can trade.

A conservative character will almost always get at least one success, but will rarely archive anything dramatic or suffer from failure. I had one player take this option and he managed to always stay one step ahead when he was hunted, but never enough to break away.

A reckless stance is likely to either get a lot of successes or none at all. The other fun option is that they get the successes but wear themselves out suffering from fatigue or stress. My other player took this option and his character mentally wore himself out enough that he passed out during a negotiation, luckily he made a great first impression with his winning smile card that I let the others carry over some of his bonuses.

Successes are compared against the Action Cards you carry (again I'll cover it later) to determine what the effect of your roll is. If there isn't an Action Card then you use the general stunt card to represent that without training there is only so many successes you can get towards an action.

You also have boons and banes which cancel each other out, but the one with symbols left over affects the result. Banes cause a negative even with a success. They might simply make a test more tiring (inflict a fatigue/stress point) or it could mean something went wrong like you pick the door but you make a lot of noise so a guard finds you. Boons do the opposite and mean something went right whether the test failed or not. Usually used to recover stress or fatigue, but could also mean that while you failed to open that locked door you heard the guard coming in time to hide.

All in all I find it a very simple system that resolves problems quickly. Once you've done a couple of challenges, whether static or opposed, grabbing the right amount of dice only takes a few seconds and figuring out the results takes even less time. It allows for some quick play when it comes to mechanics allowing you to focus on descriptions and keeping the game moving.

GBH -by Jensen

...And Ah can still hold a shield in me other hand!

Hmm, you know how anal the GM can be – you may have to settle for a buckler.

The only negative side I see is that it is limiting when it comes to the idea of lots of successes. You can only really get a couple (usually 3) successes towards doing an action before it caps, then you have to rely on boons for any extra special touches. On the upside this does prevent min/maxing from being effective and can actually be detrimental to a character.

ROLEMASTER/SPACEMASTER: THE CROTLIV CONVERGENCE

by Lev Lafayette

In 1992 with a draft print-out of a Rolemaster Companion VI I ran a 78-hour, single-session game at Valhalla Games and Hobbies in Perth, Western Australia (ten minutes per hour was allowed for breaks, cumulative, not added to running total). This epic session serves as the retrospective for this issue of RPG Review; a combination of horror, science fiction, a version of cyberpunk and fantasy all mixed into one with Rolemaster and Spacemaster rules and the Dark Space supplement.
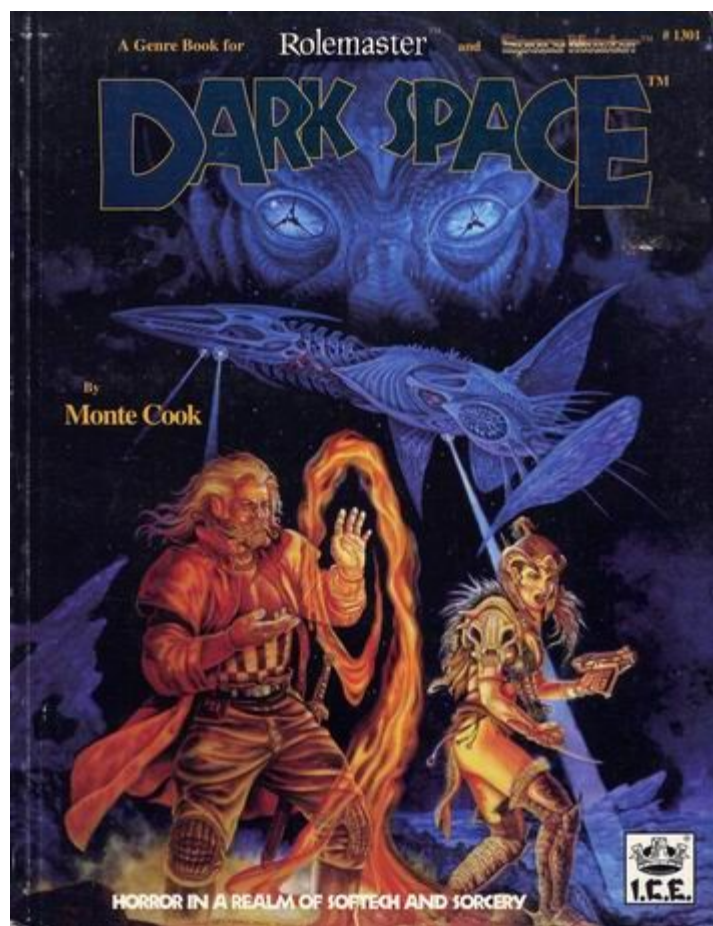
The Dark Space setting consists of a group of twenty planets scattered among several star systems. Unusual for a science fiction setting, a religious purge generations past wiped out nearly all 'hard-tech', such as computers, robots, nearly all machinery, weapons and the like. With the development of biotechnologies and the blessing of the State-religious order ("the Citadel") a version of an interstellar society developed with plastic ships that travel between the stars with a massive biological brain, and grafted creatures acting as cybernetics; the latter providing a particularly disconcerting feel for players – how would you feel about letting a jellyfish-like creature attach itself to your eyes to provide low-light vision, or having a snake grafted onto your shoulder?

Other power groups in the Twenty Worlds include The Cartel, an all-encompassing megacorporation, the Interworld Defense Force, the armed forces of the Interworld Senate, the Lorist academic association (what would Rolemaster be without Loremasters?), the Gemini Society, a dualist religious-philosophical group, the Scarlet Underground, a network of bounty hunters, assassins and the like and, finally, far less well known, the Vlathachna, an elder alien species with a expansionist desires. Ironically, it was ancient Vlathachna manuscripts that led to the development of soft-tech. But that's another story...

This four-part story assumes the use of Rolemaster (1st, 2nd or Classic), Spacemaster (2nd edition), Creatures & Treasures I & II. Cyberspace would also be very useful.

Crotliv

The game begins in Crotliv, third of the twelve planet Riptass system, on the very edge of the twenty worlds. The four-moon planet has 20.1 hours per day and 555.7 local days per year. A small planet (about 8,000 miles in diameter), the planet has some four billion people and is governed by the democratic Council of Three Hundred, based in Quirminius. Of particular note however, is the almost lawless city of Ryssar, nestled between mountains on the Thistledown River. It is here that our story begins.

The Citadel, tired of excuses from the Ryssar government, is organising it's own strike force in the independent city-state seeking out a Preservationist cell, which has so far fought engage in a series of successful destructive raids against Citadel temples. The Preservationists are a small group of reactionary "old-tech" members, who oppose the introduction of the new "soft-tech". Entirely independently, the central administration of Quirminus is about to establish an economic embargo on Ryssar due long-overdue non-payment of central taxes – this action is implicitly supported by the Cartel who receives significant "business welfare" from the central administration, and has hitherto been unable to break into the independent traders in Ryssar.

Player Characters

In the original story, the four player characters included (a) A Philatheon Assassin, a Human Lorist (Seer), a Metamorph Politician (Magician) and a Human Cyborg, around levels 15. The alien Philatheon, like other members of this ancient species took very little interest in the politics of human affairs. Instead they were concerned with the honour of the contract, and the art and science of their profession, and is quite specialised in their skill-set. The Politician was a member of the Crotliv Council, but was also a metamorph escapee from Cartel experiments. The Lorist is a personal assistant to the Politician and a member of the Gemini Society and is seeking a potential alliance between that group and the Preservationists (a group within the Gemini Society seek a "balance" between hard-tech and soft-tech). The

GBH -by Jensen

Cyborg, is a technician of both the soft- and old hard-tech variety, represents the Preservationists and carries quite a collection of disguised old hard-tech upon their person, which can be taken from *Cyberspace* if available.

Part I: Everything that Rises Must Converge

In the first scenario a meeting is arranged between the PCs, each of whom has particulars to deal with each other. The Politician wants to arrange for the assassination of the Bishop of Mi, a Citadel fundamentalist who is the main driving force behind the pressure that has been placed on Ryssar, who will present at an upcoming meeting of the Council of Three Hundred. The city is prepared to give tacit approval to this plan through laundered money, meeting 75% of the costs of hiring the Philatheon Assassin, who should argue for a fee of around 250,000 credits for the job, which will be difficult, public and will attract attention. The Preservationists must come up with the other 25%; a sum that could be raised through the trade of old-tech goods for credits between Preservationists and the Gemini Society. The meeting is held in a suitably isolated location; a minor government works building, and protected by several Ryssar militia. After the various deals are hammered out – and this could take some time – the next recommended step is making contact with an underground character named Byrne, who specialises in getting people from point A to point B without attracting attention – in this particular case from Ryssar to Quirminus.

Alas, Byrne is not to be found, having been captured by Cartel agents and is held at the Ryssar Iron Forge, which is leased to the Cartel by the city. Byrne was taken away by Cartel agents as bait for the Politician-Metamorph. The Cartel has discovered that the Politician uses Byrne to travel from Ryssar to Quirminus for quarterly Council meetings and would like their property back. Asking locals whether they saw anything will come result in a few blanks, until a derelict old man (who received a nominal payment from the Cartel), says that Byrne was taken away from dawn raid by a number of armed soldiers; he mentions that one had a logo of a "C", surrounded by a chain. The Lorist will recognise this as the symbol of the Cartel, and will also know that their major base of operations in Ryssar is the Iron Forge.

The Iron Forge is on the outskirts of Ryssar, nestled by a mountain range. It is a fenced off area, more to stop animals escaping than to stop people from getting in. There are about a score of worker's cottages within the complex, housing approximately eighty people in total. In addition there are various mules and wagons for transporting ore, and a smelter and forge for creating iron. The perimeter has been protected by a number of movement-sensitive alarm fungi (p106 Dark Space), which are placed and activated in the evening.

There is a dozen IDF Deathtroopers in the complex, as always with a collection of the most advanced and dangerous soft-tech to augment their already significant combat abilities. They have a collection of four Spiderdrones for travel, which clever PCs may use for their escape.

Deathtrooper Scouts (4): Level 10 Rogues. Auditory or Eye Rangers, one with Timesenser. All have Burners, SCV (AT 5). Martial Arts +35, IH Edged +28, Fire +58, Perception +53, Stalk/Hide +63, Ambush +15, Body Development 130. One has a Burner OB of +30, and 75 hits, but also has 45 Psion Points and Concealment and Mind Over Matter to 10th level.

Deathtrooper Engagers (4): Level 10 Fighters. Level II Artificial Muscle (+20 Str), AT 5 Body Armor, Forger Blades, Burner Pistols, Rank 5 Nerve Stimulants (Qu). Acrobatics +68, Martial Arts (Strikes) +77, (Sweeps) +75, 1H Edged +58, Fire +48, Adrenal Defense +45, Adrenal Moves +45, Perception +35, Body Development 175.

Deathtrooper Support (4). Level 10 Magicians or Telepaths. One has a Sprayer (Level 5 Burning Spores, Level 3 Sleep Spores). The others have Heavy Burners. 60 Psion or Power Points. 10 Spell or Psion Lists to Level 10. Body Development 75.

The Cartel have a Dark Matter Bodysuit to capture the Metamorph (Cloak, Full Body, Straitjacket, Darkmatter, value 10,000 credits), under control of the second support Deathtroopers who has the spell list Dark Energy Law, who leads the group.

Part II: The Killing Fields

Assuming the PCs are successful in Part I, and have not been captured and killed, they would have rescued Byrne, a level 10 Ranger and made their escape. Byrne is not in a good way, having received quite a "roughing up" from his captors. Worse still, he's going through withdrawal symptoms from his addiction to a pleasure drug; unless he receives some of this drug he will become more of a burden over the following two weeks, eventually recovering over the same period of time. During this however, he is sufficiently together to recommend a very unlikely and dangerous path, which involves a "short cut" through a zone irradiated by the Wars of Devastation. This is considered a dangerous path, not only because of the presence of radioactive zones, but also because of perpetual rumours of "other things" that inhabit the zone.

The cross-country journey will take a total of ninety days. The hardest parts are crossing the mountains that surround Ryssar, and making it across the radioactive swampland. The Spidrones, assuming the PCs have these, can travel at a leisurely pace of 8 miles per 4 hours over mountain and 6 miles per 4 hours through the swamp. Beyond the swamp the the terrain will gradually turn into plains (12 miles per 4 hours) and then road (16 miles per 4 hours).

The Cartel will send another dozen Deathtroopers to try to find the PCs. One of their scouts (with Wing Grafts) will be spotted as the PCs make their way through the mountain pass, however they will not follow the PCs into the irradiated swamplands. If the PCs somehow manage to convince Byrne (or ignore his advice) not to take the mountain/swampland route, they will encounter the dozen Deathtroopers. In addition to one scout with Wing Grafts, another has an Invisible Sight Eyepatch. One of the Engagers has a Rnk 5 Blade Graft. Two of the Support Deathtroopers have far-ranged eyepatches.

The journey through the mountain range will have the sort of natural challenges that one would expect in such environs. A savage storm challenges the ability of the PCs to find secure shelter; a particularly steep climb challenges their climbing ability, and so forth. Giant eagle-like birds called Thyph are known to inhabit the region and these too may cause a problem (use Giant Eagle Creatures & Treasures, p44). The swamplands will be fog-covered, infested with mutant bugs, and various forms of undead. Initially this will include more modest forms such as Corpse Candles and Corpse Lanterns (c.f., p43 Creatures & Treasures), Swamp Stars (p43 Creatures & Treasures), a copse of Deathwoode (Creatures & Treasures II, p37) but ultimately a horde of Zombies (p43 C&T), led by an Undead Mass Necromancer (p42 C&T II).

> Thyph (Lvl 15, 170ft/r, Large, 280 hits, AT 4 (50), +120 Huge Claw, +80 Large Bash, +95 Large Pincer)
>
> Corpse Candles (Lvl 7, -, Medium, 100 hits, AT 1 (30), Lure, Con Drain)

Corpse Lanterns (Lvl 10, -, Medium, 135 hits, AT 1 (40), Lure, Con Drain)

Swamp Stars (Lvl 9, 120ft/r, Small, 30 hits, AT 1 (70), Lure, Con Drain)

Deathwoode (Lvl 12, 40ft/r, Large, 190 hits, AT 3 (50), +100 Large Bash, +90 Large Bite, Con Drain)

Zombies (Lvl 2, 30ft/r, Medium, 45 hits, AT 1 (15), +30 Medium Bash)

Undead Mass (Lvl 20, 60ft/r, Large, 260 hits, AT 1 (40), +100 Medium Claw x 3, plus cold criticals, 120 Power, All Evil Cleric and Open Channelling Lists to 20th level, All Closed Channelling to 10th level)

The horde of zombies should be, for story purposes, infinite in number and ultimately cause the party to seek refuge in an abandoned concrete bunker. After some hair-raising moments, they should be able to secure the building against the hordes of zombies who will bash helplessly against the structure. Inside however, the PCs will discover a cache of old-tech weaponry, include all the sorts that you would expect from a *Spacemaster* catalogue; machine pistols, assault rifles, grenade launchers, struptorguns. Alas, there are no plasmatic repeater rifles, lasers, or blasters, but the collection should be quite satisfying in terms of removing the zombie horde.

Traveling through the swamplands should take four days at normal speed with the spiderones. During this time, the PCs will be affected by a mild does of radiation poisoning (treat as a conversion poison). In game terms this is a lvl 20 attack, failure causing the PCs in question to be at -10 stat bonus loss to Constitution for a week. For each *day* after the four the PCs will be subject to a moderate dose of radiation sickness – the above, plus an additional lvl 15 attack causing an additional -20 Constitution stat bonus if succeeded, or a -20 stat bonus loss to Strength, Quickness, Agility, and a -10 stat bonus loss to Memory, Reasoning and Intuition, plus nausea and vomiting. If the PCs truly dally about, after a *week* they will suffer extreme radiation poisoning. Hopefully they will get the hint before then.

Part III: The Sanity Assassin

Arrival at Quirminus will be a gradual affair, with numerous hamlets, villages and finally towns as one leaves the swamplands and heads towards the capital. The capital itself is home to some ten million individuals, a massive, crowded, sprawling city of old-tech skyscrapers buttressed by more contemporary technologies. The massive sea and star port and markets is a sight to behold in its own right, with massive (but rare) biocrystal ships coming to dock alongside the mundane sailing vessels that travel the world of Crotliv. Despite these appearances the city enforces the Pirathon Doctrine as strictly here as anywhere else. Flagrant use or possession of old-tech is not just frowned upon, it will lead to immediate incarceration and investigation by the Citadel. PCs who try to bring in the old-tech weapons that they found in The Killing Fields will find themselves subject to investigation.

Nevertheless there is plenty the PCs should be doing in the city. The Assassin should make contact with the Scarlet Underground, and take notes on the movements of the Bishop of Mi; said Bishop will spend most of their time in the Council chambers or at the Citadel's Cathedral complex, both of which are well protected, the former by local armed forces, the latter by Sanhardrin warrior-monks, although the Cathedral is certainly less public and populated. The Cyborg should surely make contact with the local Preservationist cell and report the existence of the cache of old tech weapons in the Killing Fields, as well as discussing how negotiations with the Gemini Society representative are progressing (and likewise, the Lorist to their side of the equation). The Politician will have various functions to attend and fellow Councillors to lobby; after all these is a motion to establish an economic blockade of the city until it has paid its federal taxes. Of the three hundred Councillors, approximately 220 votes are already tied with 110 each way. A whole range of horse-trading is available to secure the forty-one additional votes required to block the motion.

What the PCs don't realise is that the Bishop of Mi – the target of their assassination – is actually a Zainmoth Vlathachna (page 143, Dark Space) with a morph skin. The real Bishop of Mi has been disposed – driven insane and now wandering the wilds near Mi babbling to himself about seeing all the dimensions of the universe.   Sharing the Cathedral quarters with this Zainmoth is another number of other Elder Brood, a Gallogthraas (page 142, Dark Space) who delightfully lives in the high rafters of said building. Nothing like a giant spider dropping from on high in a PC's head in the middle of an ancient gothic church! Not surprisingly, the Citadel authorities are utterly unaware of the status of their "Bishop".

"Bishop of Mi" (Lvl 25, Base 80, Medium, AT 2 (20) +100 Large Grapple, +120 Medium Bite, Poison, +84 1H Edged, Hits 175, Power Points 125, All Evil Mentalist Lists to 25th level, all Open Metalist Lists to 25th level, all Closed Mentalist lists to 20th level).

Gallogthraas (Lvl 10, Move 70, Medium, Hits 180, AT 3 (20), +90 Large Bite, Poison)

Sanhardrin (Lvl 10, Move 65, Medium, Hits 90, AT 1 (70), +80 Martial Strikes and Sweeps, plus Finger Blades (p90 Dark Space), All Open Channelling to 5th level).

Part IV: Cold Days

There is plenty that could go wrong with Part IV, leaving the introduction to the fourth part of the story quite open. If the assassination of the Bishop of Mi fails, the attempt will be subject to investigation by the local forces (who are quite competent at drawing motive to connections etc). In such cases, the motion to blockade Ryssar will, of course, succeed and an entirely different plotline follows. If however the assassination succeeds, with the Gallogthraas liquidated as well, then the PCs have proof of a Vlathachna conspiracy. With investigation of the "Bishop"'s quarters, evidence will be found of an orbiting Zhainmoth Death Ship, so positioned to pick up the Bishop once the conflict between Ryssar and the rest of Crotliv is confirmed.

With the success being assumed, the PCs will go through a briefing from the IDF which, it is presumed, they do not give to much away – although there is difficulty is explaining why they were investigating the Bishop's quarters. If this goes well however, then then the PCs will part of a Crystal Cutter Ship attack force (page 121 Dark Space) against the large Zhainmoth Death Ship (page 123 Dark Space). This will be a mighty battle – and dangerous as well, as it is fought in the emptiness vacuum of space.

Zhainmoth (Lvl 15, 80ft/r, Medium, 150 hits, AT 2 (20), +100 Large Grapple, +120 Medium Bite, Poisons, +70 Weapon, Spells)

IDF Forces (Lvl 9, 70ft/r, Medium, 100 hits, AT 12 (20), +70 Burner, +50 1 HEdged)

If the PCs are successful in invading the Death Ship, and they have the capacity to do so, they will discover some personal correspondence from Shallamoth Kindred (p141 Dark Space) with the Archbishop of Kish, chief contemporary advocate of the Pirathon Doctrine and the use of soft-tech. But that's the beginning of another story.

LEOPOLD'S CRYPT: CTHULHU D20 DELTA GREEN

by Mike Daumen

"In 1964, Delta Green agents intervened in the Belgian Congo crisis. Under attack from government troops, CIA mercenaries, and Belgian paratroopers, the hard pressed Simba and Mule'le' rebels were turning away from Marxist-Leninism, and back to tribal mysticism for their answers. The Simba and Mule'le' rebels had embraced an ancient and evil religion in their desperation to throw out the Europeans and planned to 'summon their god Ahtu to devour their enemies.' In Operation KURTZ, Delta Green agents succeeded in preventing a dimensional 'rip' similar to the one planned by the Karotechia in 1945."

-Delta Green core rulebook

Actual Play Plot Synopsis

Three operatives - Cuban ex-pat Pilot Miguel Alvarez, ex-Legionnaire/current mercenary Hans Kosci, and academic Lillian St. John – were given Delta Green clearance to investigate the theft a Congolese tribal artifact (half of a worked copper amulet, evidently donated from Delta Green after the war – see the CoC adventure "Dead of Night" in H.P. Lovecraft's Arkham) from the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Brussels. Lillian examined the scene of this crime before boarding Miguel's C-47 "El Brujo" en route from Central America to Africa. Hans relocated from a UN camp – the peacekeepers in the process of leaving the country due to the quelling of the Katanga secession crisis – in Luluabourg to Leopoldville where the group met. Briefed by CIA personnel, they discovered that the second half of the artifact was likely in storage at the Elizabethville offices of the Union Minière du Haut Katanga.

The trio managed to travel there in search of the piece, finding it just as the rebels began an offensive in the city. Lillian retrieved it, risking death in a stairwell, while Miguel and Hans held off more rebels keen on burning the company headquarters down. Here they discovered that the Simbas may indeed have had supernatural assistance, in the form of a fetish that prevented bullets from wounding them. Thinking quickly, they removed the objects from their foes before dispatching them.

Back in the capital, Lillian had discovered more information from a German tome (the Dhol Chants) obtained at Lovanium University – one of the last known locations of her missing father. Within its pages she discovered a ritual to divine the location of one half of the amulet with the other. However, this magic worked in both directions, as their first attempt to secure the missing fragment brought them to a nearly deserted airstrip in the heart of the Congolese jungle. During the landing, a shadowy tentacle nearly wrecked the plane before killing one crewman on the ground.

The only inhabitant of the nearest village was a Belgian priest of dubious sanity, who had narrowly escaped a Simba attack. The cleric brought them to a mass grave – the source of his distress – in which the locals had been dumped after having their right hands severed. Without discovering the motive for these grisly crimes, the group returned to Leopoldville, determined to take more initiative the next time they confronted the cult.

As it turned out, their opportunity came quickly. Along with elements of the Belgian military's Operation Dragon Rouge – a raid on Stanleyville to rescue European prisoners – the group flew to the besieged city once more. Soon after landing, they discovered the reason for the mass grave, as dozens of severed hands crawled into planes and vehicles bent on sabotage. Removing the last of these assailants, the party drove off in a jeep towards a hotel rumored to be housing several hostages.

After a tense reconnaissance of the hotel, the party realized they were too late – many hostages had been moved to a stadium in the center of town. However, Lillian was overjoyed that the white doctor working with the seriously wounded there was in fact her father, who agreed to accompany her to safety. The Belgian paratroopers were notified and the heroes left for the stadium.

The chanting there was audible even over the growl of their truck's motor and the sounds of combat throughout the city. As they picked their way on foot through a tunnel into its center, they saw the flickering of a titanic bonfire, around which were many Simba leaders and the two jungle witches in charge of the ceremony. By this time the amulet was straining in Lil's hands, pointing straight at the knot of villains. Hans did not wish to see the conclusion of the ritual, so after sniping one witch the party entered, sowing chaos amid gunshots.

Immediately, many civilians tried to flee through safer exits. The surviving witch summoned a cloud of leathery-winged, bat like creatures to attack the investigators: "kongamato" to the hordes of terrified spectators. Despite these odds, the group eliminated the other witch and secured the other half of the amulet. A shadowy Russian, claiming to be part of the UN mission, led them to the river's edge, where a CIA team established their bona fides and returned them to saner locales.

See also: Dragon Operations: Hostage Rescues in the Congo, 1964-1965.

Available at: http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/resources/csi/odom/odom.asp

Simba Rebels

Use statistics for an offensive-option character 2 levels beneath the average party members' level. They are protected with Simba Fetishes (see below).

Simba Witches

Spells: Contact Nyarlathotep (Ahtu), Create Crawling Claw, Enchant Item (Simba Fetish), Locate Object (Amulet of Ahtu), Summon/Bind Byakhee.

Crawling Claw

Species Traits Construct: Crawling claws have the traits and immunities common to constructs.

Gaze Immunity (Ex): Because it lacks eyes, a crawling claw is immune to gaze attacks.

Smite Fallen (Ex): A crawling claw's attacks deal double damage against prone combatants.

Crawling Claw: CR 1/3; Diminutive construct; HD 1d10; hp 5; Mas —; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; Defense 15, touch 14, flat-footed 15 (+4 size, +1 natural); BAB +0; Grap –12; Atk +4 melee (1, claw); Full Atk +4 melee (1, claw); FS 1 ft. by 1 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SQ construct, gaze immunity, smite fallen, spell resistance 10; AL any; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will –3; Str 10, Dex 10, Con —, Int —, Wis 5, Cha 5. SAN Loss 1/1d3.

Skills: None.

Feats: None.

Kongamato

Rend: If both claws hit add 2d4+4 damage

Immunities: Immune to vaccum, extreme heat, cold, zero pressure, lack of breathable air.

Kongamato: CR 3; Medium sized-monstrous humanoid (lesser servitor race), HD 4d8; hp 18, Init +2, Defense 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13 (+2 Dex, +3 natural), BAB +2, Atk +5 (2, claw), +0 (bite); FS 5ft by 5ft/5ft, SQ rend (if both claws hit add 2d4+4 damage, darkvision 60ft, immune to heat, cold, vaccuum; Str 17, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 12, San loss 1/1d6, Skills; Balance +3, Hide +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +6, Spot +5, Tumble +3

Also appears in medium (5-8 HD) and large (9-13 HD) varieties.

Kasai Rex (Tyrannosaurus)

Species Traits

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the Kasai Rex must hit an opponent two or more size categories smaller than itself with its bite attack. If it gets a hold, it shakes the grabbed opponent back and forth, automatically dealing bite damage each round. Once the opponent stops resisting, the tyrannosaur attempts to swallow on its next turn.

Blindsight (Ex): This ability gives a Kasai Rex low-light vision of 150 feet. It is particularly attracted to active infrared sources (such as the beams generated by first-generation night-vision appliances). Observers with knowledge of herpetology or zoology may conclude that organs similar to a viper's pits allow this ability.

Swallow Whole (Ex): If a Kasai Rex begins its turn with an opponent two or more size categories smaller than itself held in its mouth, it can attempt a new grapple check as though trying to pin the opponent. If it succeeds, it swallows its opponent, automatically dealing bite damage. Once inside the Kasai Rex, the opponent takes bludgeoning damage equal to the tyrannosaur's bite attack plus 1d6 points of acid damage per round from the monster's gizzard. A successful grapple check allows the swallowed creature to climb out of the gizzard and return to the Kasai Rex' maw, where another successful grapple check is needed to get free. Alternatively, the swallowed creature can attack from inside the gizzard using claws or a Small or Tiny slashing weapon. Dealing at least 25 points of damage to the gizzard (Defense 20) in this way creates an opening large enough to permit escape. Once the creature exits, the tyrannosaur must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 20) or die, whether or not the full amount of damage was dealt with a single blow. A Kasai Rex' gizzard can hold 2 Medium-size, 8 Small, 32 Tiny, or 128 Diminutive or smaller opponents.

Kasai Rex: CR 11; Huge animal; HD 20d8+80; hp 170; Init +1; Spd 40 ft.; Defense 14, touch 9, flat-footed 13 (–2 size, +1 Dex, +5 natural); BAB +15; Grap +32; Atk +22 melee (4d6+13, bite); Full Atk +22 melee (4d6+13, bite); FS 10 ft. by 10 ft.; Reach 15 ft.; SQ improved grab, blindsight, swallow whole; AL none; SV Fort +16, Ref +13, Will +8; Str 28, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 2, Wis 15, Cha 10. Sanity Loss 0/1d4. Skills: Listen +11, Spot +11. Feats: None.

Serpents of Ahtu

Use the statistics for a Viper from the CoC rulebook. In place of poison, the creature's bite inflicts 1d4 Dex damage and 1d4 Con damage (special abilities that mitigate cold damage also function against this). Observers will see the effects of extreme cold affecting the victim, although nothing can be done to comfort him. Subsequently, the DC of a

victim's saving throws against spells used by Ahtu cultists are increased by any damage inflicted in this way.

Enchant Object (Simba Fetish) Enchantment

Components: V, S, M; Cost: 1 Int Damage and 1d3 Sanity; Casting Time: 1 hour; Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels); Targets: Specially-prepared fetish within a 5-foot-radius circle; Duration: Instantaneous; Saving Throw: None; Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

You create a number of protective fetishes up to twice your caster level. Wearers you designate at the time of casting gain Damage Reduction 10/melee weapons and 5/enchated weapons.

Material Component: The fetishes are crafted by combining rare jungle plants and animal parts. Only casters with the correct Craft and Knowledge skills can obtain these resources in the wild.

*Create Crawling Claw , Transmutation [Evil]*

Components: V, S, M; Cost: 2 Dex Damage and 4 Sanity; Casting Time: 1 hour; Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels); Targets: Severed human left hands within a 5-foot-radius circle; Duration: Instantaneous; Saving Throw: None; Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

You create a number of crawling claws up to twice your caster level. The hands to be transformed must all be within a 5-foot-radius circle. Once created, the group of crawling claws obeys your telepathic commands as long as the instructions are simple and you are within 100 feet. If you give the crawling claws simple standing orders before moving out of range, they obey these orders to the best of their ability until you return and issue new orders. Otherwise, they mill about aimlessly, attacking anything that moves into their space.

Material Component: Crawling Claws must be fashioned of hands removed from victims alive at the time the limbs are removed.

Book: The Dhol Chants: German, by Heinrich Zimmermann. A copy exists within the library of Lovanium University. 17 weeks to study (DC 17). Spells: Locate Object (Amulet of Ahtu). Sanity Loss 1d4/1d6, Cthulhu Mythos Gain +1 ranks.

Map from the 'Federation of the Free States of Africa'.
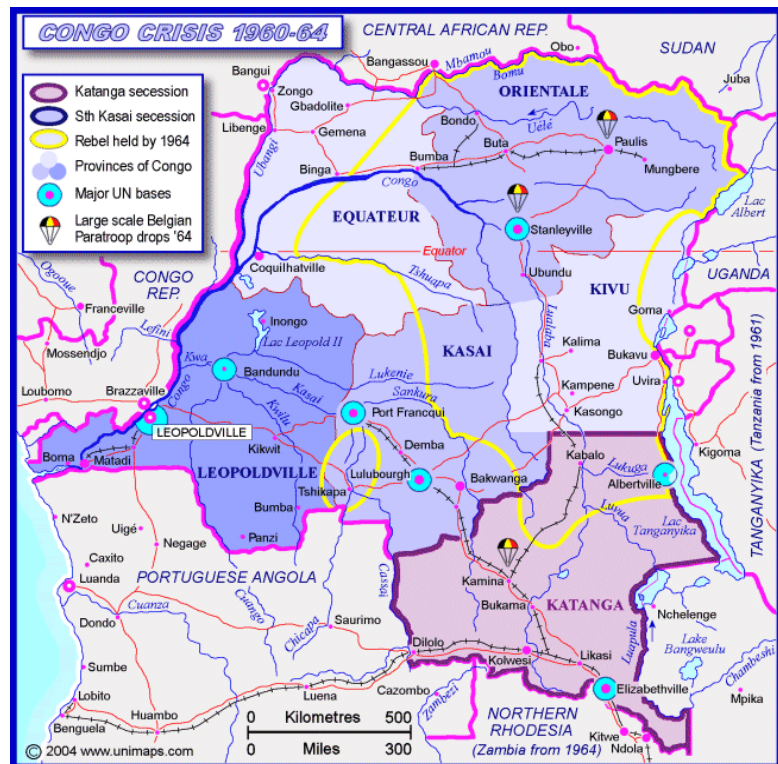
DRUSTOS'S DIARY: A NOVICE HALFLING DRUID IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE (D&D, GURPS, RQ)

by Keith Ealanta

For the majority of my friends this will be totally irrelevant.

For a small select few this will probably be an all too intermittent record of our game from the point of view of my character Drustos.

For those without the context - Drustos is a halfling druid in a game being run by Reynardo.

This first post covers extracts from his diary over the years before he first sets out adventuring.

Extracts from Drustos's diary , a Halfling Druid initiate

...

Life in the city suits me. Sure everyone is so tall, but the rooms are spacious and I seem to be able to get away with most things due to people assuming I'm a child. Somedays I hate it ("No! I will not get her permission, she isn't my mummy, I'm an adult Halfling! Now get me my beer.") But it does mean that people let me get away with forgetting my chores or sleeping in. Anyone would think no-one has met a halfling before.

The temple is nice too. They don't have any animals in the actual temple of course - it's all for the elemental spirits - all the animals live outside of town - which is nice 'cause that means we don't have to spend too much time cleaning up after them. The elemental spirits are much easier to deal with (except fire - only the high priest is allowed to feed the fire behind the high altar - and it still sometimes bites him though they say he's starting to get it to respect his desire not to be burned - if he can manage that it'll be the highest fire this temple has ever raised.)

We had a big festival last week, and they brought lots of the animals in from the housing-temple. Most of them seem very poorly disciplined. I can see why we are so needed if they are to achieve enlightenment. It took us days to clean the floors afterwards, and poor Miguel got bitten by a serpent. They say he'll live, but it was a close thing for a while 'cause he didn't want to get the serpent in trouble for it's lapse. They say that meant he got sick 'cause he had joined his karma to it's, so in the end both he and it will have to be punished to purify them. They say they'll wait till his karma improves a bit first though or he might die and have to come back as a lower form.

...

I think they are thinking of promoting me to guardian soon. I've avoided it so far - it looks like hard work, and it's so hard to keep a balance between showing love to your change and disciplining it for it's errors. They say you'll know if you get it wrong because you'll start to feel sick, but then they say only the masters can tell when you first start down the wrong path. I hope they give me something easy. When they asked me I said I'd like a cat 'cause you don't have to clean up after them, but they say cats are for advanced guardians 'cause they don't accept their discipline, and they are too independent, and they can hurt you too much. That swot Gudran said he'd like to get a cow. He must have been sneaking into the senior library 'cause he knew all about them being higher forms and all. I said to Jeanna that someone would mistake him for a cow-pat and we both got into trouble fo giggling.

...

It was my first day as an apprentice guardian today. It was much more fun than I thought, but it was hard work too. They left me with a family of rabbits to look after. They said they needed to learn to be around people so I needed to sit with them and stroke them and try to achieve communication with them (I wish i'd listened more in communication class - I think they said something about rabbits communicating with their noses, but I can't smell well enough to tell what they might be saying). The thing that was really hard though was that I was supposed to make sure they also learned to behave like civilised beings. It's hard to sit quietly enough to communicate with one rabbit when you have to keep running across the room to stop another rabbit from trying to have sex with his sister. No wonder they are so far down the wheel.

...

Success! I finally managed to communicate with a rabbit! Elder Yuran was right - all the stuff in the library was about how they communicate, but nothing was about why. It wasn't till I tried to pretend to be a rabbit that I figured it. The stupid thing is they have nothing very good to say - they're all about how bored they are and how their straw is to dry or too wet or too sour or too moldy, or how they are more important than me so I have to get out of their way or how it's my job to scratch their head. I hope the higher animals are more interesting.

...

I think Elder Yuran is getting senile. He told me I still hadn't communicated with a rabbit and that maybe I should try practicing by communicating with people. What does he think we were doing?! He says communication is more than just hearing what people say and then telling them what you want. I think he just likes to hear himself talk and that he

should let me start to work with some more interesting animals.

I knew exactly what the rabbit was saying or I would never have realised how boring they are. He says I've got to keep on trying to talk to them till they seem interesting again. I think he hates me 'cause I look so young and he's so ancient.

...

More boring rabbit time! Jeez I wish they'd just shut up. I tried thumping to show them I was displeased and the big female bit me and told me off. What does she think I am? One of her Kittens? I'm going to go down to the docks and see if I can talk to one of the cats down there.

...

Finally out of the infirmary - The carers there say I messed up my karma by trying to talk to the dock-cats. They reckon I was lucky to survive. Apparently the dock cats are too far gone for even the high priest so when I tried to talk to them I got beaten up by sailors. Once I get better I'm on stable cleaning till I'm strong enough for my punishment.

...

Urgh! Six weeks as a rabbit - pushed, bitten, kicked. I feel like I spent all my time grooming the other rabbits, and I couldn't get any of them to understand about not peeing in the straw. They just all grumble about no-one replacing it for them. Now I'm back, I'm apparently back on rabbit caring duty. I think I'd better take one day away first or it's rabbit- cassarole for dinner!

...

Wow, well it looks like life is going to get interesting now.

I started back with the bunnies but at least now I knew why they were grumbling about the straw. So I got it changed, and checked the water, and got them some of the tastier grain. Before long they were rewarding me with snuggles and grooming. Somewhere along the way I suddenly realised what Yuran had been saying. I was so excited to hear the words I wasn't listening to the message. Anyway, things went so well over the last couple of week that I've been given my first field mission. I've been handed a bag of gold coins to equip myself then I'm to go across the mountains to pick up a wolf called Liska. It seems she's just left puppy school and has some real promise, so I'm to go and try to see if I can lead her to more experience and improve her understanding of the world. I'll admit I'm a bit scared. I've never been further than the housing-temple on the edge of town, and now I'm to go on my own across the mountains and the sea. But on the other hand I'm to get to look after a wolf - and they say she's so big I might even get to ride her if she'll let me.

Drustos Uetla (Dungeons & Dragons, v3.5)

Lawful Neutral, Druid Level 1, Halfling, Small, 41 years, Male

STR 6 (-2), DEX 17 (+3), CON 12 (+1), INT 13 (+1), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 10 (+0)

HP 9, AC 14 (flat 10, touch 14), Initiative +3, Base Attack +0, Melee -1, Ranged +4, Fortitude +4, Reflex +4, Will +5

Skill Ranks: Diplomacy +1, Handle Animal +4, Heal +4, Listen +2, Ride +4, Spot +2, Survival +1, Swim +2

Feats: Animal Affinity, Armor Proficiency (Light), Armor Proficiency (Medium), Shield Proficiency

Spells: 3 times level 0, 2 times level 1.

Languages: Common, Druidic, Halfling, Sylvan

Drustos Uetla (Mongoose RuneQuest)

Druid Cult Initiate, Halfling, 41 years, Male

STR 6, CON 12, DEX 17, SIZ 6, INT 13, POW 15, CHA 10

Actions 3, Damage Modifier -1d4, Hero Points 2, Magic Points , Movement , Strike Rank

Hit Points; Each Leg 4, Abdomen 5, Chest 7, Each Arm 3, Head 4

Cultural Background: Barbarian
Profession: Shaman

Additional Skill Bonuses: Athletics +10, Bow +20, Dagger +10, First Aid +25, Healing +10, Influence +20, Language (Halfling) +50, Lore (Animal) +25, Lore (Plant) +5, Lore (Regional), Perception +20, Persistence +5, Resilience +15, Riding +10, Runecasting (Beast) +10, Sling +10, Stealth +5, Survival +20, Tracking +10

Drustos Uetla (GURPS 4th Edition)

130 Character Points = Attributes +105, Advantages +39, Disadvantages -40, Skills etc +26

Lawful Neutral, Druid Level 1, Halfling, Small, 41 years, Male

ST 6 (-40), DX 15 (+100), IQ 12 (+40), Will +1 (5) HT (+0)

Advantages: Ally, Yurgan (10), Acute Hearing (2), Acute Vision (2), Animal Empathy (5), Animal Friend (5), Magery I (15)

Disadvantages: Curious (-5), Honesty (-10), Struggling (-10), Sense of Duty, Nature (-15)

Languages: Halfling (Native) [0], Common (1), Druidic (1), Sylvan (1)

Skills: Animal Handling (4), Bow (1) Diplomacy (1), First Aid (4), Riding (4), Survival (1), Swimming (2), Shortsword (1), Shield (1)

Spells: Lend Energy (2), Lend Vitality (2), Minor Healing (1)

PRECEPTOR – DESIGNING A TEACHING RPG

by Alex Greene

Introduction

Everybody remembers the first tabletop roleplaying game they bought.

Mine was *Traveller* (Marc W Miller, GDW) in the late 1970s. Since then, I have run and Refereed many different games, and written material for game core rulebooks (**Hunter: the Vigil**), sourcebooks (*Night Stalkers* and *World of Darkness: Dogs of War*) (White Wolf) and Mongoose Publishing's *Signs & Portents*. But I never forgot *Traveller*.

Your first roleplaying game introduces you to more than just a setting; it also teaches the basic concepts common to all tabletop RPGs.

Some do this better than others. Some infamous RPGs are nightmares to learn; other games, usually based on commercial franchises, were more concerned with establishing the setting than with introducing RPGs to freshers.

I propose the concept of **Preceptor**: a teaching roleplaying game, designed to give complete newcomers, or *freshers*, a complete, simple and engaging start to roleplaying.

A start they will never forget.

Objectives

Preceptor's objectives are:-

- to introduce roleplaying to complete freshers;

- to include exercises designed to teach all necessary skills;

- to act as a playful, educational stepping stone for freshers, leading to all the other roleplaying games they will encounter.

Components and Structure

Preceptor would come as a boxed set, containing the core rulebooks, some character and reference sheets, a screen, and multiple sets of dice in different colours and shapes, say four sets in red, blue, green and yellow.

The basic core rulebooks are as follows:-

Book 1: Players

Book 1 introduces the core concepts of roleplaying to fresher players, such as:-

1. What roleplaying games are about - their origins and a general FAQ.

2. Pen and paper, character sheets, non-cubic dice, cheat sheets and so on.

3. The roles of *player* and *character* or PC.

4. PC Characteristics, skills, advantages, backgrounds and so on.

5. Conflict resolution: task difficulties, target numbers, simple tasks (swinging a sword), complex tasks (conducting extensive research, working a ritual spell) and overcoming resistance (the skill's or spell's Effect rating set against a task's or barrier's Resistance, for example).

6. The goals and objectives of a scenario - who "wins," who "loses," coping with the idea of character death ("No, Blackleaf!") and so on.

7. Getting into character ... and out of character again.

8. Downtime and recording character activities - bluebooking, keeping an in character blog, and so on.

Exercises include statting up one another as characters and a sample conflict, *FIBUA*, detailed further in Book 2 below.

Book 2: Referee

This book concentrates on teaching freshers Refereeing for the first time. It describes:-

1. The role of the Referee.

2. Game time, from combat rounds to encounters or scenes, through to chapters or single sessions, stories or full adventures, up to chronicles or campaigns with character and plot arcs.

3. World building and creating a consistent setting.

4. Creating NPCs.

5. Character advancement - reprising the player section on record keeping, this time with NPCs in mind.

7. Moderating players, controlling min/maxing and rules lawyers, wallflowers and so on.

8. Making each game fun and memorable throughout.

The *FIBUA* (Fighting In Built Up Areas) sample conflict is detailed further here, introducing the concept of Referee - only secrets and exercising the Referee's ability to run games, and tactical situations in particular.

Book 3: Settings

Preceptor is not designed with a single standard internal setting. Unlike most roleplaying games, where the setting is bundled with the game and is considered integral to the rules, Preceptor's basic design is transparent – just the game engine and toolkit.

The Settings section lists four main genres of roleplaying games. Enough detail is given to allow the Referee to flesh out a given setting for a game that is uniquely theirs.

1. *Straightforward Swords & Sorcery Fantasy* - Dungeon crawls and derring-do in a rustic pre-industrial setting where no weapon more powerful than a crossbow exists.

2. *Science Fiction* - Laser blasters, robots and aliens, this is the Space Opera setting of *Traveller* and the like. Includes Time Travel and ties to the Historical setting, and notes on the SF equivalents of the Cloak & Dagger Fantasy known as Cyberpunk, Art Decopunk and Steampunk.

3. *Superheroes* - four colour Spandex-clad adventurers fighting crime. Capes optional.

4. *Horror* - Any and all of the above genres, but concealing a darkness not born of human motives. The shadows contain Things which move. Some seek to feast on soft human flesh. Other shadows seek to rule ...

Book 4: Miscellanea

Lists of everything else Players and Referees need for **Preceptor** game sessions.

- *Powers and Principalities*: Whether mutant superpowers, magic and sorcery, psionics or cybernetics, characters and NPCs wield literally superhuman abilities. This examines all kinds of basic powers, such as telepathy, invisibility, flight and telekinesis, energy bolts or Netjacking - as well as a Referee system for creating new powers.

- *Beasties*: Raging beasts and monsters are just as much a threat to life and limb as other people. From wolves to dragons to mutant hunter-killer mutant wasp drone swarms, this lists some ready-made critters and adds rules for making more.

- *Equipment*: Useful resources, from improvised barroom weapons to futuristic but tiny supercomputers, from sixguns to silencers to swords to sorcery tools.

- *Gamer Culture:* An overview of gaming culture, from PBEMs to LARPing; from setting up games at home to organising tournament play; from supplements to merchandise.

- *Roll Your Own*: **Preceptor** is designed to plant a seed of creativity. Who knows what new and original roleplaying game could emerge from that seed?

Supplements and Sourcebooks

Every roleplaying game has supplementary sourcebooks, and **Preceptor** is no exception. Bearing in mind **Preceptor's** teaching role, however, the supplements would include new exercises, bringing even more new concepts and settings to players and Referees.

New settings include:-

1. *Cloak & Dagger* – Intrigue abounds. Assassins lurk in every shadow. Trust no-one.

2. *Historical* – Ancient Rome, World War I or II, the Stone Age, the Sixties, the Wild West, Feudal Japan. Where will your imagination take you?

3. *Spy Games* - Tuxedoes and ballgowns replace cloaks, and silenced pistols replace daggers. But the intrigue game's the same.

4. *Cyberpunk* – Spy Games go science fiction.

5. *Steampunk* – Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine works. The internet comes to the world a century early, at the height of the British Empire of Queen Victoria.

6. *Hardboiled* – The world as seen through the bottom of a Dashiell Hammett whisky glass. Grim and jaded, the world of the *noir* detective in a fantastic 1940s setting.

Conclusion

At the moment, Preceptor is still under development. However, it is feasible as it would fill a niche in the market: the provision of a roleplaying game system to give new people a happy, memorable start to the hobby.

GBH -by Jensen

21st CENTURY TECHNOLOGIES: TL 9 GURPS

by Karl Brown and Liz Bowman

TL9 computing ubiquity

By the middle of this century a variety of brain implants are available, although most people don't bother since a network permeating almost every synthetic object gives humans almost instant access to data, memory, and expert advice.

So what does this mean is GURPS terms? Can we assume that at TL9 every item costing $2000 with a volume of 0.1 contains a tiny dumb TL9 computer ($20*, 0.25 Lb vol. 0.01, complexity 1) if it contains no other computer. Even if you buy caviar or a diamond the case it comes in has one of these in it. These tiny computers wirelessly connect to other computers on request at a range of 1m. Typical contents include full specifications, video, catalogues, advertisements, and software. The bulk of the memory in these limited machines is ROM preventing hackers from changing the programs though small changes to the data can occur such as updates to the information from the product's manufacturer. (*This limitation halves the value of the computer.)

Cheaper objects, anything costing $2 or more have a simple ROM chip that can be read by computers at a wireless range of 30cm. Even ice cream cones have these in the wrappers. These chips contain only a terabyte of information usually instructions for use, nutritional information, games, the companies catalogue, some infotainment videos etc. The value of the software and data on these free chips and computers is 1/1000th of the cost of the item purchased. Both of these items do not need to run datalink and can be read by any other TL9 computer with a datalink program running. However neither has any other way of being accessed.

Centagenarian Template

He's a recent article from Nature about the biodemographics of ageing. It discusses how lifespans have extended and what factors have contributed to more people living longer, and more older people being healthier. I confess I haven't finished reading it yet, but it serves to emphasise how attitudes to hitting certain age milestones are in the process of changing, and will be different in the future. Just don't get Alzheimer's.

Abstract:

Human senescence has been delayed by a decade. This finding, documented in 1994 and bolstered since, is a fundamental discovery about the biology of human ageing, and one with profound implications for individuals, society and the economy. Remarkably, the rate of deterioration with age seems to be constant across individuals and over time: it seems that death is being delayed because people are reaching old age in better health. Research by demographers, epidemiologists and other biomedical researchers suggests that further progress is likely to be made in advancing the frontier of survival - and healthy survival - to even greater ages.

One quirk of the demographics of 2090s is the increasing proportion of the population over 100 years old. Most of this

centagenarian population is somewhat frail but a few are healthy, active, and have over a hundred years of experience and skills to draw on. There are a lot of ways to create a playable character over 100 years old. One easy way to create a character over 100 years old is as follows:

Begin by buying attributes a point or so better than you want.

1. Buy Longevity (5) so you only fail aging rolls on 17-18. Your character is healthy and has good genes. Note that with Longevity the Age disadvantage is worth zero points!

2. Next make all your aging rolls. If you don't want a dice-rolling extravaganza use number of aging rolls x 0.0184, round up then subtract this average amount from among your Attributes as you desire*. This done re-determine the cost of your Attributes.

3. You should take the TL8 Career advantage (see p24).

4. Now determine your Disadvantages, you may wish to choose some of the age related disadvantages (reduced Appearance, Bad Sight, Extra Sleep, Hard of Hearing, Hidebound or Obdurate, Absent Mindedness, Short Attention Span, Terminally Ill, and Weak Immune System).

5. Total up your point cost so far. Now spend remaining points on skills and Advantages. Note that one of the chief advantages of older characters is very high skill levels. You can have skill points equal to twice age. For Centagenarians this can be over 200pt of skills, more than a 150pt starting character can afford. If you are spending a lot of points on Advantages you may wish to reconsider and transfer points into skills.

*For example a character born in 1971 should make 82 aging rolls for each Attribute. Therefore 82x0.0184=1.5088, round up makes 2. The player could lower one chosen attribute by 2 or two attributes of her choice by one.

This shortcut only works if you have Longevity which keeps the chance of aging roll failure low and stable. Why 0.0184? The chance of rolling a 17-18 on 3d6 is 0.0046 and there are four attributes, 0.0046x4=0.0184.

MY LIFE WITH BOSS

by Dan LEstrange

"The life of a executive is a hard one. The horrific things you do make it difficult to feel good about yourself. If only someone loved you.

A dysfunctional relationship with your Boss in the high powered life of Corporate Executives for Newsprint Limited. A game of modern horror and self loathing set with a backdrop of life at the top of the Journalism field.

My Life with the Boss is a corporate adaptation of Paul Czege's award winning game My Life with Master. *Prepare to serve a most ambitious sociopath and eventually be his undoing.*

My Life with the Boss was run at KapCon XIX in Wellington, New Zealand, in January 2010.

There are six playable characters in My Life with the Boss. Forest Deacon, Chief Financial Officer, John Goines, Marketing Manager, Julia Wright, Chief of Visual Media, Verity Williams, Chief Editor, Jason Schuster, Chief Journalist, Rebekah Caulfield, Director of Human Resources Each character has been pre-created to fit convention play. Characters are detailed at the end of this document.

Each character has a more than human trait and a less than human trait listed on their character sheets. These traits are, in practice, used as colour for the characters, yet they can do things to the flow of the game. Take notes of each more than human / less than human, anything that falls under these traits should be considered an automatic success (or failure).

Each character has two connections from the following: Petra Daniels (local Shortland Street actress) , Henry Dunant (local leader of Red Cross Orphans Charity) , Paul Reynolds (Jr Accountant of Newsprint Limited) , Yousef Ramoud (Routers Co – competitor Journalist) , "Open Wound" (Government Insider) . These connections provide both victims and moral support to the characters and each is used to inspire emotive responses from the characters. As they are tied to successfully resisting the Boss, the characters should want to assist and not harm their own connections and be reluctant to harm connections of other characters.

In detail – Petra Daniels (Local Celebrity)

Petra is a local actress from a daily New Zealand soap – Shortland Street. She is has a ethereal beauty and her character suffers tragedy after tragedy during the soap which means that she inspires pity. Petra is however, rather new to the

media scene, she could also be called naïve in respect to handling the media.

Petra is the target of the first commands for Julia Wright, Chief of Visual Media. As Julia is instructed to get raunchy pictures of Petra for page three of the Newspaper. This is a big step for the actress (if she is willing) as this will dash her current media image of homely goodness.

Petra has connections with John Goines (Marketing), whom she used to date before getting a media profile, Verity Williams (HR) whom she has had business dealings with and Jason Schuster (Chief Journalist) who has been stalking her for many years (although Petra is unaware of the infatuation).

Petra should inspire pity from the characters, as a personality who being abused by the media (and by extension the Boss) which will eventually result in her meltdown. For inspiration to play her, look to Susan Boyle (UK Idol runner up), Lindsay Lohan (from before she became a media sensation to her current state) and Brittney Spears (with her public meltdown).

In detail – Henry Dunant (Red Cross worker)

Henry Dunant runs the local (struggling) Red Cross orphanage, just out of town. The orphanage is currently on a "campout" – as much from necessity as from choice – and Henry and his volunteers are doing the best that they can to ensure the orphans are well taken care of. Henry is aware of the media scene, although places little value on its worth. He is a campaigner for a better world through hard work, honest donations and good intentions.

Henry is the target of John Goines first command, and John Goines has been instructed to "woo" Henry to support a marketing campaign and generate a good public perception of Newsprint Limited. Henry has connections with Rebekah Caulfield (who has been siphoning funds to the Red Cross for years), Verity Williams (who he dates and has a relationship with), and Forest Deacon (old mate and drinking buddy).

Henry should inspire admiration, or a difficult struggle. Henry is doing the good work under a good cause, a complete opposite of the characters own plight. Henry is inspired by real world characters like Fred Hollows (Australian Eye specialist who used to work in the Philippines), Mother Teresa and Princess Diana.

In detail – Paul Reynolds (Jr Accountant)

Paul works for Newsprint Limited as a Junior Accountant, a job he got through his uncle (and connection) Forest Deacon. Paul is one of the linesmen of Newsprint Limited and is excited about his opportunity to work with Newsprint as all young employees are. Paul is unaware of the media scene, although is excited to learn. He is eager to do what his superiors ask of him and is generally unaware of the consequences of his actions.

Paul has connections with Forest Deacon (his Uncle) and Jason Schuster (a good mate).

Paul is the target of the first command of Verity Williams (Chief Editor), and Verity is instructed to send Paul into a potentially deadly situation because the Boss is disparaging of Paul's letter to management. Paul is indirectly affected by Rebekah Caulfield's first command as well, as Paul falls under the group that the Boss instructs Rebekah to cull from the company ranks.

Paul should inspire hope from the Characters, he represents what the characters may have felt when they began at Newsprint and what they may be feeling at the start of the game (a wish to do well for the Boss). Only the character increasing self loathing and realisation that the Boss is a tyrant differentiates Paul from the characters. Paul is inspired

by any who has recently joined the job market, a person willing to go the extra step in order to cement their career in a new industry.

In detail – Yousef Ramoud (Competitor Journalist)

Yousef works for a rival company to Newsprint Limited; however he should represent the idea of a friendly rivalry rather than a hostile one. Yousef should give no reason for the characters to dislike him, other than the instructions of the Boss – he is meant to represent a healthy competition in the workplace. Yousef is also an Arab, and thus highlights the unfair racial bigotry that can arise in the media's interpretation of public perception of Arabs and those from the middle east.

Yousef is well aware of the media's capabilities and will fight back – targeting the organisation of Newsprint rather than the individual – if attacked by the characters. Yousef has connections with John Goines (old school mate) and Julia Wright (professional colleagues). Yousef is the target of the first command of Forest Deacon, Forest is instructed to "find dirt" on Yousef and discredit him as a journalist.

Yousef should inspire respect from the players, while the media industry can be considered to be a cutthroat business (especially in the Boss's eyes), Yousef should seem to rise above it and still fight fairly. Yousef is inspired by the overwhelming majority of investigative journalists in the media industry to date. A real passion for getting the truth of the story and no love of the sensationalist practices of some papers in order to sell more.

In detail – "Open Wound" (Government Insider)

"Open Wound" is the codename for a Government insider. He represents the myriad of contacts that the journalistic community has to allow them to get the inside scoop on operations by the government. "Open Wound" also represents the shadier side of investigative journalism, where a no-questions-asked policy is still in place. "Open Wound" is the least at risk by the activities of the characters, his identity is a secret, his background shrouded in mystery. He will willingly go along with the characters if they chose to misdirect the activities of "Open Wound" to another connection.

"Open Wound" has connections with Julia Wright (Chief of Visual media) and Verity Williams (Chief Editor) as an informant and verifier of information. "Open Wound" is the target of the first command of Jason Schuster (Chief Journalist), and Jason is instructed to expose him to the Boss and find out everything that Jason is able to.

"Open Wound" is inspired by Deep Throat (the insider from X-files and the Watergate scandal).

The Boss

Central to the success of My Life with the Boss, is the Boss. The aspects of the Boss are below (as per My Life with Master rules)

Aspect:	Boss/CEO
Type:	Teacher
Needs:	Domination
Wants:	More Money, More Readers, to be proven right in all things

Some aspects of the Boss

The following are some of the characteristics that the Boss will (or may) display during the game.

Ruthlessness., Uncaring., Profiteer., Driven., Racist., Rich., Uncharitable., Environmental Terrorist., Sensationalist., Bureaucratic., Overbearing., Pedantic., Favouritism., Ambiguous expectations/Goals., Loud/Rude/Talks over staff., Takes credit from staff., Discuss negative events continually and searches for faults in staff., Lacks integrity, breaks promises, and is dishonest., Unethical., Belittling., Micromanaging

Playing the Boss

Firstly, it must be said that the Boss is NOT a character. The Boss must be considered a force of nature or a driving motivator to get the characters into a position where they feel that there is nothing more that they can do but resist the Boss's commands.

When playing the Boss, it is useful to have a trigger – in my case it was a cigar – that highlights that the GM is playing the Boss to the players and allows the GM to get into character to say and do the things that the Boss wants to do.

The Boss is bigoted, racist, nasty and ruthless – however the Boss can not complete his objectives without the characters involvement (the Boss is also lazy). He has a confidence that his minions will attempt to complete the tasks as instructed, however lacks confidence in their ability to actually complete those tasks.
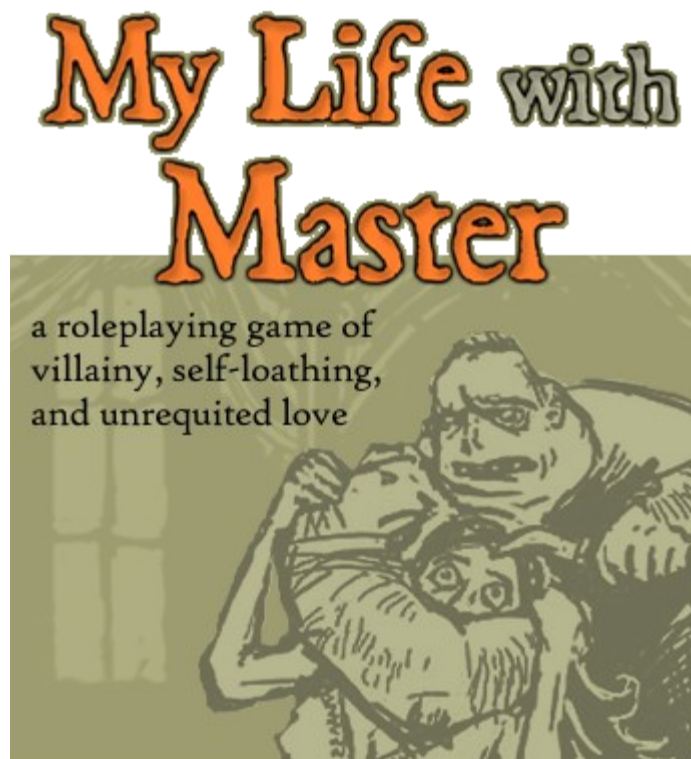
The Boss is misunderstood, the Boss wants to be liked, the Boss wants to be appreciated, and the Boss wants to be respected. However when the characters show that they "like" the Boss, or appreciate the Boss or even respect the Boss, the Boss can see through their guile and realises that it is just a grab for power of the Boss's assets.

The Boss has an extremely powerful position in the game, at least initially the characters will be unable to resist the Boss's commands, the Boss should however begin with commands that allow the players to get into character, and continually escalate those commands until the characters realise that the Boss's power is hollow and the characters have no choice but to resist.

The Boss must be memorable if this game is to succeed. Be prepared to be flamboyant, loud, outspoken and to make a performance of the times that the Boss is centre stage.

The Boss is not the GM, nor is the GM the Boss. The Boss is just a motivator for the players, a source of information on what impossible task they should attempt to complete. The Boss should be an obstacle for the characters to overcome, not a cherished NPC who can escape any conflict.

Introduction of the Game

Always introduce yourself and the game, explain the rules and take your time about this. Be familiar with the rules as written of My Life with Master.

My conventions that are not listed in the rules as written for My Life with Master.

- Desperation, Intimacy and Sincerity dice are the domain of both the players and the GM. This will need to be introduced at the start of play with the importance of the dice to success strenuously stressed.

- No more than 1 overture action in a row for any character.

- End Game and Horror Revealed scenes happen at set times. These will be extra scenes. Horror Revealed scenes are slightly re jigged to fit the game within the convention time frames.

- Bring each scene to its conflict as quickly as possible, the answer "yes, and..." should be the only one the GM requires until a conflict is declared (by either the player or GM). On average you will only have about 5 minutes to complete a scene.

Horror Revealed

In a slight change about the Horror Revealed, unfortunately in a convention setting you do not have the time to "waste" a scene with a character describing the horror revealed as opposed to generating Love or Self Loathing.

Horror Revealed only appearing at one of three times (at the 1st hour mark, the 2nd hour mark and in practice just before the end game mark), the player with the "Horror Revealed" is then instructed to describe the response of the public to the activities of the characters thus far.

I would begin by answering an open question relevant to the current events in the game – for example – "given that Henry Dunant has been vilified in the media, how does the public react to further fundraising by the Red Cross?", and allowing the player to describe the response.

Opening Statement / Setting the scene

The scene: Characters are all sitting at the board room table, the Boss is hidden behind a large chair. He's on the phone.

"Look here, you snivelling little turd, when I say I want those pictures - I want those pictures, I don't care if your halfwit mother wants to have a white xmas, you ain't getting any leave until those pictures hit MY desk. In fact, fuck it, you ain't getting any leave period - sit your arse down in the park outside that dumb bitch Petra Daniels house and wait for the picture you god damned lazy shit."

He turns to the characters

"Right, for Christ sake - hire a bloody Jew to do a job and you need to give them god damned road map just so they can find their own chopped up prick. This fucking company would go down the tubes if it wasn't for strong leadership and direction - MINE - I don't know why I hired *you* lot either - right lot of useless pricks you are."

"Who's up first?"

- ▪ Whomever chooses to take the first command will be your starting character, travel left from that player until you return to that player a second time (i.e. all characters have had two scenes, usually a command and an overture or attempting to complete a command).
- ▪ At that second return, you should be able to do an End Game or Horror Revealed check.

First Run of Commands and player actions

The following is the initial commands given to each character, note that with the exception of the first command (the player who responded to the opening statement) each character can choose to take a command, do an overture or act out a command.

Players should be able to set the scene for what ever action they choose to take, the GM should provide suggestions based on the background material, but the players should have most of the narrative control.

The players are likely to take the narrative outside the boardroom, or to other unusual places, the GM's best answer to any suggestion or request by the players is "yes, and…" The game is currently set in Wellington, New Zealand (feel free to change as relevant).

Each player should have the opportunity twice to perform an action (within the first round it is extremely likely that everyone gets at least one command). To keep to the time line, this should only take about 50 minutes to complete.

Forest Deacon
"The sodding bean counter huh? Keeping your retirement fund clean are you? - Yes I know about your tucked away savings - be thankful that I haven't turned you in to the IRD. Right, I have a job for you, simple enough for even you to do. Our reader numbers are down, and the competition is getting nasty. Time to buy them out. Routers Co is within the price range, but I want to buy it for a steal - their head journalist - Ramoud - he supplies all the integrity for the company - defame him. Destroy him. Make him nothing in the readers' eyes. I want scandal; I want to know that he's a gay loving, neo-fascist, terrorism supporting Arab. Make it happen!"

John Goines
"Oh Christ its you. You sold your own mother yet? My lord man I ain't seen such a dirty leech since my time in Malaysia - god damned Malaysians - suck your blood they do. Steal the shirt from your back they will. So... what can I have you do for me huh? Something you won't fuck up hopefully, but I'm not holding my breath. I need a new corporate face of Newsprint limited, something bullshit and squishy, light-hearted yet.... heart-warming to the stupid masses. Something.... charities... charities are good. There is a Red Cross orphans camp up near Trentham way, sign a deal - get them to advocate buying Newsprint publications. Get their boss up here for a photo shot - shaking hands and that sort of bullshit rubbish - but make sure they are presentable... I want sympathetic, not pathetic."

Julia Wright
"How are you doing honey? Liking the good life down in that library of yours? You know you could make VP one day; you'd just need to pop those tits out once and a while and do a dance for the rest of the team. The boys here would be salivating over you in no time. Your job is a simple one baby, time for Newsprint to get glossy - and I mean sexy. I need hot pics... and I mean HOT. Get me my nude shot of Petra Daniels - you know the one - the slut from Shorty Street. That'll bring the readers in, everyone likes a bit of arse on page 2! and would it hurt to wear a low cut top from time to time! Its like looking at a slate wall every time you walk in here..."

Verity Williams
"Verity - my overpaid, under qualified, waste of time editor. What do you do when not trying to screw up my paper?

pull the wings off flies? Steal candy from children? Christ if I was a father I would get the child to run 10 miles to get away from your ugly mug - the wicked witch of the west you are! Well its time to earn your keep, accounting have a new boy - Paul something... Reynolds I think. He sent me a bloody letter "Dear Sir, I very much enjoy being part of your fine company and would like to express my gratitude about granting me this opportunity to help build Newsprint to the best that it can be" - fucking brown noser if any I thought so. Time to teach him a lesson - there is a Gang HQ out in Newtown, tell him that the boss needs something special from the Gang leader - something that would make the Boss even more grateful that we hired this snivelling shit... convince Paul to go get me a Daddie fresh from the pen!... ha ha!... should come back bow legged he will!"

(FYI – "Daddie fresh from the Pen" is a recently release Sexual Offender)

Jason Schuster
"I thought we fired you? God Damn I need to talk to HR. Right, as we have you we should bloody well use you. There is a secret government agent - "Open Wound" is what they call him. He needs to be exposed - my friends in the Beehive are getting might pissed off at the info he is spreading around - and I need my friends to be happy. I need to know his name, his department, his fucking favourite position and I need it recorded. Bring me that recording!"

Rebekah Caulfield
"Still stalking all the office hotties are we Beks? I know your secret. Looking up files is just another form of a peep show to you isn't it? Okay, I have jobs for you. I am getting sick and tired of all the bloody slackers that we have hired... fucking ugly women with kids, Jews and Malay. Slackers all of them. Fire them. All. I want all their contracts terminated by the end of the week - and hire me some new people - attractive women, Aryan men - business men, real workers - none with kids. Call it a restructure or something, and make it look nice in the press."

Check for End Game / Horror Revealed

After each player has had a turn twice, go around the table and do a check for End Game or Horror Revealed. This is also a good time to summarise what is happening in the game world (the Horror Revealed is a good way to allow the players to do the summarising).

N.B. Horror Revealed:

In a slight change about the Horror Revealed, unfortunately in a convention setting you do not have the time to "waste" a scene with a character describing the horror revealed as opposed to generating Love or Self Loathing.

Horror Revealed only appearing at one of three times (at the 1st hour mark, the 2nd hour mark and in practice just before the end game mark), the player with the "Horror Revealed" is then instructed to describe the response of the public to the activities of the characters thus far.

I would begin by answering an open question relevant to the current events in the game – for example – "given that Henry Dunant has been vilified in the media, how does the public react to further fundraising by the Red Cross?", and allowing the player to describe the response.

Second Round commands and player actions

The second commands the characters received are partially dependent on the results of their first command (if they have or haven't completed it), and partially dependent on the actions of the other characters. Guides to the characters

for orders follow.

As a loose guide follow the below instructions, however always escalate.

Forest Deacon

If successful - Ramoud should be disgraced. Townsfolk should become more cynical about life, morose and depressed. Anti-monopoly or anti-globalisation protests are starting to rise and often they stop at the Newsprint Limited head office. While Newsprint haven't yet brought Routers (although CFO could do it), it is obvious to the population that this is what it intends. Newsprint limited reader numbers remain unchanged. CFO next task could be to FIRE all the workers from Routers and set it up as a shell company for Newsprint to launder money - Paul would be "volunteered" to oversee this operation.

If unsuccessful - Routers (and Ramoud) runs a campaign against monopolies and greedy corporations with their wealthy benefactors. The boss is not impressed. Orders CFO to start laundering money (with a fall guy - Paul) hiding it as donations to the Red Cross.

The key to Forest's escalation is either through his connections (putting Paul or Henry Dunant into trouble or dire straights), or using his money (his "more than human") for increasingly nefarious deeds. Order Forest to buy things – like the Red Cross and then destroy them, order Forest to cut funding to things – like staff members superannuation or leave payouts – order him to use that money for the Boss's benefit.

Eventually Forest will crack, and that really is the idea.

John Goines

If successful - Henry Dunant should be ready for photo shoot/publicity stunt with the Boss - Townsfolk should laud Henry Dunant as reaching one of the big corporations - Henry is nominated for Wellingtonian of the Year (for his charity work and stuff). Newsprint reader numbers remain the same. The boss is not impressed, in fact, he's angry. DCC next task should be to put Petra Daniels (naked) and Henry Dunant in the same room. Time to disgrace him.

If unsuccessful, the boss is not impressed and above remains.

John Goines is often played as a suave media marketeer, so attack him were it hurts. He generally needs orders that are leading others into trouble, not trouble for himself directly – for example, bringing Petra Daniels to the Boss's room and ordered to remain outside, or creating situations where Yousef could be confused as a terrorist (i.e. "mistakenly" putting a story out with a picture of Yousef about potential terrorism in Wellington).

Julia Wright

If successful - Petra Daniels should be "exposed" in the media - Townsfolk start to hunger for more sensationalist press - reality TV shows start to rise, the porn industry in Wellington reports record growth. Newsprint reader numbers increase, the boss wants more. CVM next task would be to photograph government officials in compromising positions. Get the scandal.

If unsuccessful, the Boss is not impressed, his page 2 doesn't have a story - orders CVM to get insider story pronto. Either that or lose her job!!

Julia can be attacked through her connections, "Open Wound" or Yousef, although generally they do not hold a lot of weight with the players. Julia is often portrayed as a confident worker, successful in her own right, and further attacks

on her legitimacy as a photojournalist has worked in escalation with Julia. Order Julia to take photos of prominent connections in the game and then have the Newspaper print outright lies about what the photo is attempting to portray (or lies about what the situation was in the first place). Order Julia to then begin doctoring photos to match scandalous stories.

Verity Williams

If successful Paul should be harmed - Violence and riots are more common by the townsfolk, violence seems "verified" as a valid course of action. Sexual assaults and rape on the rise. The boss doesn't care Newsprint readership declines (which doesn't make the boss happy). Orders CE to blame the Red Cross for the rise in violence (it harbours criminals), to get proof that this is happening, and to bring the Red Cross to justice. Also Paul is brought to the office and CE blamed for his plight.

If unsuccessful, Paul unharmed, bosses "fun" was inhibited, he's not happy. Orders CE to verify a government conspiracy (that the Govt is bankrupt, John Key is a puppet to the US, and the RBA is about to go under) with her "contact" and rival company Routers Co.

Verity's first instruction is the one that brings violence into the game, and thus escalation of Verity's orders in practice tends to be quite natural. Order her to allow stories of Paul Reynolds (lies all) to go to print, have the Boss order her to obey the "Boys Club" and step aside for another editor (who doesn't do any editing) and then order her to take the fall when he fails. Verity in practice also tends to get out there and attempt to stop others from completing their orders (in particular re Henry Dunant).

Jason Schuster

If successful - "Open Wound" should be compromised but either way - Townsfolk want to know more about the Governments dealings, racial attacks on the rise as the Boss slants the story to the fact that he is a Jew (or Malay, or an ugly woman). Newsprint Readership rises, the Boss wants more. Needs more proof that the Jews are responsible for all things wrong in this world. Orders DOO out to get proof that Henry Dunant (another Jew) is a corrupt cheat, and if they can't find the info - to make it up!

Jason is a true journalist, so continue to order him to "get the story". And if he can't get the story to "make the story". This can be useful for the players to keep track of the activities of the game if Jason is ordered to track and report. Eventually the Boss will order Jason to get the story on the assassination of one of the connections, or rather hands Jason a Gun.

Rebekah Caulfield

If successful, all Jews/ugly women/Malays should be fired - including Paul Reynolds, and new employees hired.

Townsfolk accept the "restructure" or whatever it was called without comment, racial attacks on the rise. No change in Newsprint readership. Paul Reynolds starts a lawsuit for illegal dismissal and Boss orders DHR to justify the dismissals or bribe the courts to throw the case out - Open Wound could be useful there. (either mentioned by boss or others)

If unsuccessful, Boss not happy. Orders DHR to cut costs in other ways, cut everyone's pay by 50% (except the boss) and her own by 75%. Initiate a performance reviews on all senior staff and report back.

Rebekah's escalation tends to go towards ordering her to strip other characters of their benefits (listed on the character sheets), or Ordering Rebekah to oversee further cutbacks in Newsprint. Attacking Rebekahs connections Petra Daniels or Henry Dunant tends also to stir Rebekah into action.

'As MacKenzie's layout was seen by more and more people, a collective shudder ran through the office (but) MacKenzie's dominance was so total there was nobody left in the organisation who could rein him in except Murdoch. (Everyone in the office) seemed paralysed - "looking like rabbits in the headlights" - as one hack described them. The error staring them in the face was too glaring. It obviously wasn't a silly mistake; nor was it a simple oversight. Nobody really had any comment on it—they just took one look and went away shaking their heads in wonder at the enormity of it. It was a 'classic smear'.'

Quote by Peter Chippendale and Chris Horrie on The Sun's reporting of the 1989 Hillsborough Disaster.

Hints, Tips and Advice

The following are some final hints, tips and advice before we get to the End Game.

1. Keep the game moving, don't stop
2. Escalate, Escalate, Escalate
3. Watch your time, if necessary award "Self-Loathing" or "Love" to characters outside their turn if the actions seem warranted and your time is low
4. "Yes and…" is your greatest tool as a GM.
5. You have 5 minutes to bring each scene to a conflict point, know the My Life With Master system intuitively to bring out what the players need to roll as soon as they ask.
6. Continue to encourage the players to award sincerity, intimacy or desperation dice. Lead by example.

It is quite possible that you have a troublesome player or two; usually these are quickly identified as a player who is enjoying the depraved requests of the Boss and is asking for more, thus not resisting the Boss (and thus not being able to complete the game).

There are a couple of strategies for this sort of player, the first is to escalate the commands given by the Boss until the player is in a situation where they can do nothing but resist. This is fraught with difficulty as it may result in the GM breaking the rules set down in the disclaimer.

The second strategy is to give the character commands that are impossible to complete. One of my examples was ordering the character to go around to all of the shops in the Wellington region and replace the front page with a new one; this was an action that the character had no chance of completing. Further escalation of these sorts of commands eventually leads the player to the believe that the Boss is really just a nasty person and should be resisted.

End Game

The End Game possibilities are as wild as the players you will have, however a couple of points the GM should be aware of at the End Game stage.

The character will always "win" the End Game, and the Boss knows this, he will attempt to go all out to defend or fight or attempt to convince the character that going against the Boss is not the best way. The Boss will beg, he will make lewd remarks, he will insult, he will cry, he will scream. As the GM it is your responsibility to make this happen, stand up and take it too the players – this is the Boss's last hurrah.

Conclusions

Know the background of the game, know the rules of My Life with Master, and portray the Boss as wild as you can. These three elements will ensure that you have a unique and fun experience when playing My Life with the Boss.

In the two times I ran My Life with the Boss at KapCon, both ended very differently and took very different tracks. This is to be expected, some characters will fixate on protecting their connections and growing Love, others will attempt to satisfy the Boss (growing their Self Loathing) and others again will attempt to disrupt the actions of the other characters.

Ultimately however, and this is what My Life with Master is about, it will return to resisting the Boss and completing the End Game.

As I have suggested, play the Boss to the hilt, this is one of the ways that the players will remember this game and get enjoyment from it, the second point in which the players will have enjoyment is the relative freedom they have from a GM that says "yes, and …" to all of their requests.

Game Tools / Devices

Organisational Chart

This is the lose organisational chart I used for My Life with the Boss. While not completely necessary it did help the characters get a feel for what their character was responsible for. This is deliberately convoluted.

The Boss
Heads: Newsprint Limited
Reports to: None
Reported to by: Heads of all departments

Forest Deacon, Chief Financial Officer
Heads: Finance Department
Reports to: Human Resources, The Boss
Reported to by: Editing Department, Human Resources, Journalists, Archivists & Photojournalists, Marketing Department

John Goines, Marketing Manager
Heads: Marketing Department
Reports to: Finance Department, Human Resources, The Boss
Reported to by: None

Julia Wright, Chief of Visual Media
Heads: Archivists & Photojournalists
Reports to: Editing Department, Finance Department, Human Resources, The Boss
Reported to by: None

Verity Williams, Chief Editor
Heads: Editing Department
Reports to: Finance Department, Human Resources, The Boss
Reported to by: Archivists & Photojournalists, Journalists

Jason Schuster, Chief Journalist
Heads: Journalists
Reports to: Editing Department, Finance Department, Human Resources, The Boss
Reported to by: None

Rebekah Caulfield, Director of Human Resources
Heads: Human Resources
Reports to: Finance Department, The Boss
Reported to by: Finance Department, Archivists & Photojournalists, Journalists, Editing Department

Corporate Values

The following is the corporate values for Newsprint Limited. At the very least this should be in the hands of the player playing Rebekah Caulfield (her Less than human relies on this).

Corporate Values of NewsPrint Limited (RETPSDEFFCIP)

Results Orientation	Efficiency
- Set clear objectives for yourself and your job. - Prioritize work to achieve goals. - Evaluate progress toward the objectives. - Complete tasks and meet deadlines. - Get the job done despite obstacles and difficulties. - Accept responsibility with a "can do" attitude.	- Delegate tasks appropriately. - Ask for help when needed. - Communicate clearly and concisely, both verbally and in writing. - Carry out directions promptly. - Make the best use of others' time as well as your own. - Take the initiative to solve recurring problems and eliminate redundancies.
Excellence	**Flexibility**
- Prepare thoroughly for each task. - Plan your work and anticipate potential problems. - Follow through on tasks and assignments - Hold yourself to high standards of	- Keep the big picture in mind. - Look for ways to make change work rather than objecting or resisting. - Adapt your behaviour to the needs of the situation.

performance. • Strive to exceed goals. • Push yourself and others to excel.	• Participate as a follower as well as a leader on teams. • Adapt plans and reprioritize tasks as circumstances change.
Teamwork	**Fun**
• Contribute fully to the activities of the team. • Step in and help out other team members when needed. • Share information and resources with team members. • Work out conflicts directly with the person involved. • Build a wide network of relationships throughout D&AR and the college	• Use humour appropriately to encourage and energize. • Communicate excitement and enthusiasm about the work. • Look for ways to inject fun activities into the work place. • Demonstrate an ability to laugh at yourself. • Manage personal stress and stay cool under pressure.
Professionalism	**Continuous Improvement**
• Maintain confidentiality. • Speak the truth. • Limit personal business on the job. • Stay focused on work rather than getting distracted by gossip. • When problems arise, work to find solutions rather than complain. • Speak constructively of co-workers, the job and the institution.	• Challenge conventional thinking. • Question current policies and practices when appropriate. • Regularly review completed tasks and projects to identify opportunities to improve. • Learn from failure and move on. • Actively invite constructive criticism on every area of the business.
Service Focus	**Innovation**
• Ask what the customer needs. • Listen attentively to what others are communicating. • Respond in a timely manner to customer requests. • Handle even difficult customer situations with diplomacy and patience. • Go the extra mile to serve.	• Generate new ideas and creative approaches to problems. • Encourage creativity in others. • Recognize and reward innovation and calculated risk taking. • Demonstrate a willingness to experiment. • Pursue a unique idea or approach to get it implemented.
Diversity	**Personal Learning**
▪ Respect personal differences and values. ▪ Actively seek to understand others' point of view. ▪ Consider other ideas open-mindedly. ▪ Acknowledge the needs of others. ▪ Respond non-defensively when others disagree with your views. ▪ State your own views honestly and openly.	▪ Watch others for their reactions in order to pick up on the need to change. ▪ Ask for and act on feedback from others. ▪ Constantly re-evaluate your own skills and capabilities. ▪ Create a personal development plan. ▪ Use every assignment as an opportunity to learn something new

THE MECHANICS OF FEAR AND MADNESS: A REVIEW OF MAJOR SYSTEMS

by Lev Lafayette

"My God, who is this Schiller, this convulser of the heart? Upon my soul, I write to you because I am frightened!"
(Samuel Coleridge to Robert Southey, 1784)

There are, of course, many different types of fear. The fear felt by Samuel Coleridge, is quite different to shock experienced in a contemporary horror film, with its emphasis on immediacy and gore. Nevertheless, the writings of Schiller *are* fightening, even though his works centred on experienced which *initially* seemed quite mundane, but with the inclusion of additional knowledge a gradual creepiness lingers and grows over days, raising itself to one's consciousness when the mind wanders, reminding the reader of the situation and its implications. Both the immediate and the gradual or the alien and the seemingly mundane are ways that fear and horror can be presented. Once dedicated to tales of terror from Europe and, to a lesser extent, America, horror was almost exclusively the realm of the gothic, with both the known and the unknown sourced in the transition from traditional to modern society. Now we are well aware of how independent of setting horror has become; from the mythic past, to the far-flung future, all have the opportunity for horror.

For the purposes of this article there is no need to dwell too much on generating a sense of fear or horror in the experience of play. To a large extent this is very well documented elsewhere, and not least of all by the very games systems that we're looking at. The good folk at White Wolf, for example, have dedicated a great number of pages on how to apply background music, various props, make use of story pacing, and techniques such as foreshadowing, vignettes, cut-scenes and cliffhangers. The second edition of Chill gives an excellent elaboration of the elements of horror, covering psychological elements (e.g., isolation, mystery, reversal), physical elements (location, lighting, weather), along with noting the connection between the wider social issues of the day, The interest here however is to give a brief review and analysis of how some of the major horror-styled games apply, in a systems sense, fear and madness. Specifically the games reviewed will be Call of Cthulhu, the World of Darkness, the Ravenloft supplement for Dungeons & Dragons, GURPS Horror, Kult, Chill and, more recently, Trail of Cthulhu and Little Fears.

Call of Cthulhu

Since its first edition (1981) through to the most recent, sixth edition (2005), Call of Cthulhu incorporated a characteristic called Sanity, derived from a character's Power characteristic times five. Power, in all Basic Role Playing derived games (RuneQuest, Call of Cthulhu, Stormbringer etc), represented a measure of soul, magical force, and will based on a typical 3-18 scale. Thus a standard character would have around 55 Sanity.

A theme of Call of Cthulhu, derived from the works of H.P. Lovecraft, was that madness was derived from knowledge, and more particularly from knowledge of the alien beings that inhabited the universe and its various dimensions. In a moment of design brilliance, authors Sandy Petersen et. al., included this theme as part of the actual game system by limiting Maximum Sanity to 99 minus a character's Cthulhu Mythos knowledge, expressed as a percentage. The more you knew, and understood of the true nature of the universe, the more likely your character would find their precious Sanity heading south. Maximum Sanity can be more than, less than, or equal to, characteristic Sanity. The theme was reinforced in several instances throughout the game. As can be expected encountering grotesque alien creatures, or normal beings behaving wrongly ("such as an attaching horde of frothing rats", p23 1st edition), or shocking

experiences ("a companion horribly and inexplicably mutilated", *ibid.*) could lead to a loss of Sanity. More thematically, reading "certain books" and learning spells would almost invariably lead to Sanity loss.
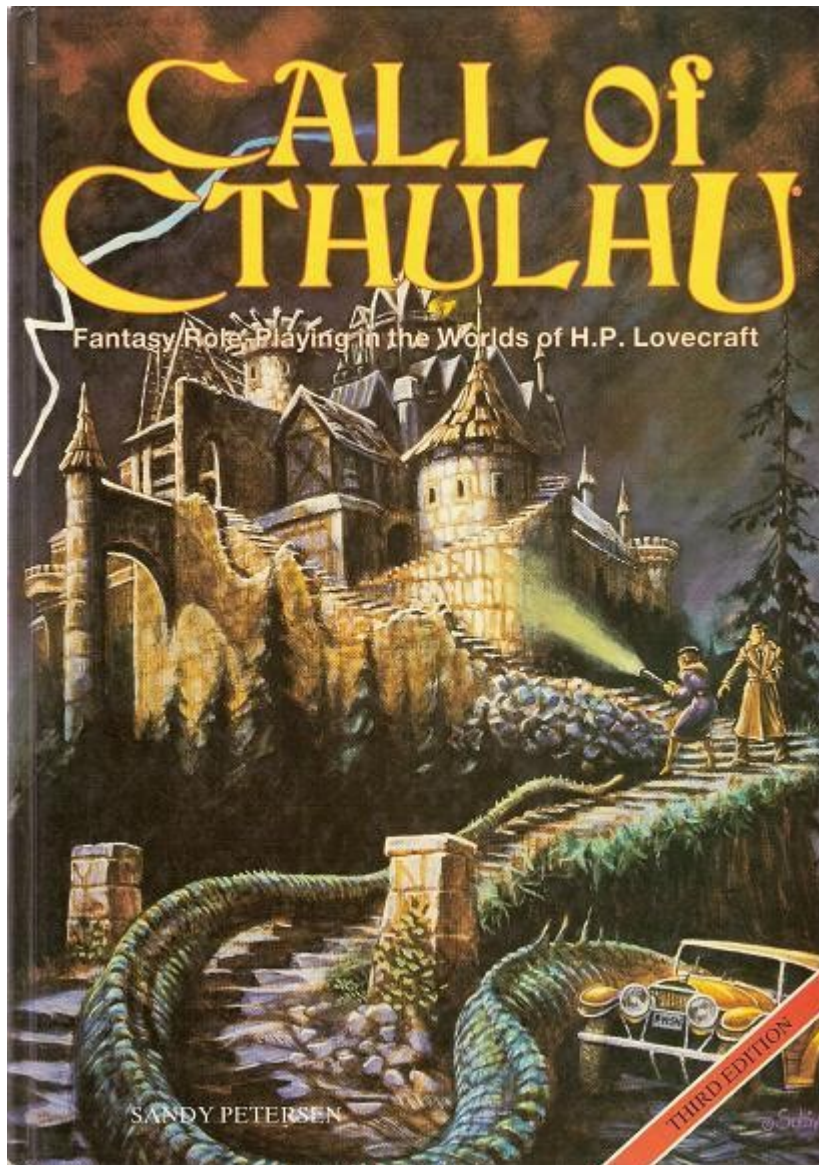
Insanity can be temporary or indefinite. If a character lost of five or more points of Sanity in a single traumatic experience, they the could suffer short temporary insanity (approximately a minute or two or hours in most recent editions, up to ten days in early editions) if they *succeeded* in an test of their intelligence characteristic. "Perversely, if the Idea roll succeeds, then the investigator recognized the full significance of what has been seen or experienced, and goes temporarily insane" (p83, 6th edition). If a character loses a fifth of current Sanity points in a game hour, then they go indefinitely insane (no test of intelligence); this madness would typically last for months. Insanity can be cured through the typical means of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, with varying degrees of success. In latter editions (third onwards) the game had two skills, psychology and psychoanalysis as different means of aiding the insane. Other means of increasing Sanity can be through increasing a character's Power characteristic (rare), improving a skill above 90%, representing discipline and self-esteem through mastery of an ability, and by defeating unnatural enemies, limited by the maximum possible Sanity loss that an encounter with such a being could bring.

Chill

Chill was first released by Pacesetter games (1984) with original design by Gali Sanchez and Garry Spiegle. Further development was carried out by Mark Acres and Ethan Sharp, and it was written by Michael Williams. A second edition was released by Mayfair Games (1990), mainly by David Ladyman. It is primarily a game of paranormal investigation through an organisation called SAVE (Societas Albae Viae Eternitata). Characters have 8 basic attributes with a typical human range between 10 and 90 (26 and 80 in first edition). Stamina and Willpower can be depleted and regenerate during the game, generating current Stamina and current Willpower; the latter is particularly important in the

context of this article. Willpower can be depleted through use of "disciplines of the art", or when encountering various "horrors from the unknown". Current values do not affect original scores which are used to determine skill values.

Both editions of the game included a skill system and a magic system ("the art"); the second edition also included "Edges & Drawbacks". Of interest here however is how ability and skill tests were conducted: In first edition a universal table was used, cross-referencing attack and defense values generated a number of keyed results of graduated and varying effect. For Fear-Checks this could result being mildly frightened (1-5 Willpower point loss), Lily-livered (1-5 points and lose actions), Scared (1-10 points, flee or cower, lose actions) or Failure (2-20 point loss, flee or cower, lose actions). In the second edition, a percentile check is made against a Target Number; a higher than target value equals a Failure. Degrees of success below the Target Number are measured as Low, Medium, High and Colossal successes. Fear Checks have current Willpower modified by how frightening the creature or situation is; an bull is a -10 modifier, a Carpathian Vampire is -35. Results are as per first edition.

World of Darkness

From the first edition of Vampire: The Masquerade (1991) by Mark Rein*Hagen to the most recent publications of the new World of Darkness (2004) the emphasis in this line has been "a storytelling game of personal horror". The "monsters", the alien, the grotesque, even the downright evil are not external in the world of darkness, but rather they are within. Starting with the ever popular blood-sucking vampire fantasy, the range of alter-egos presented by the line of games included bestial werewolves, insane fae, haunting wraiths and, perhaps, the most dangerous and evil of all, the monster hunters themselves. Fear and loathing was internal, allowing one to "experience horror from *other* side of the mirror" (p19, Vampire: The Masquerade, 1991). Call of Cthulhu was considered an unusual game insofar that the PCs were normal people facing incredibly powerful and alien opponents; not quite on the same standard as larger than life characters with special abilities facing larger than life monstrous antagonists. In contrast, for the World of Darkness, the player-characters are larger than life monsters, typically preying upon normal people.

Following Call of Cthulhu, the thematic considerations of the World of Darkness were incorporated in the game. This is aside of the game setting, with its clans, tribes etc, and disciplines, schools of magic etc. Rather the themes were expressed through additional characteristics, such as in V:TM with challenges against virtues of Humanity (Conscience, Self-Control, and Courage) facing the prospect of Frenzy and the desire of an increased Blood-Pool, or in the more recent Werewolf: The Foresaken (2005), the rising power that comes with the desire for increased Primal Urge, conflicting with Essence and trying to retain Harmony.

The illustrate the method using a more obtuse example, consider Mage: The Awakening (2005), not something one would necessarily consider to be a story of personal horror. In this game the thematic tension is between corruption and power. In Mage: The Awakening, the character's magical will is measured by Gnosis. It is used for improvised spells, it sets a limit for elaborate or powerful spells, it determines how many mana points the mage can spend in a turn, how many spells they can cast in a single action, how many active spells the mage can have operating simulatenously, and allows – at higher levels – for the character to have mundane attributes at supernatural levels (p75). However, as Gnosis increases, the mage's "aura" becomes harder to hide, providing bonuses to any who scrutinise their spells. Worse still, the effects of Paradox is greater, a magical backlash which occurs when the mage casts a vulgar spell, or when a normal person witnesses a magical effect which they believe is improbable (p123). The greater the mage's Gnosis, the greater the backlash; starting from fairly "trivial" problems such as spell going wild (havoc), the mage going mad (bedlam), reality cracking (anomaly), all the way to accidentally summoning beings from the abyss. Acting as a balancing effect to the madness that arises from Paradox is the caster's Wisdom, which is achieved through the prevention of hubris and obeying moral law. Using magic inappropriately is a minor act of hubris; using it to commit heinous acts is a major act of hubris. Thus, if a character seeks and attains power, they must not use it, least that they become corrupted and break the fabric of reality, including their own sanity; power, corruption and madness exist in tension with the player

characters desperately seeking a balance.

Ravenloft: Realm of Terror

Following Tracy and Laura Hickman's vampire-horror scenario Ravenloft (1982) for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, Ravenloft: Realm of Terror eventually became it's own setting (1989) through the works of Bruce Nesmith and Andria Hayday. It was quite a challenge; Dungeons & Dragons had hitherto been firmly set in the genre of heroic fantasy and "swords & sorcery", drawing from sources such as Jack Vance, J.R.R. Tolkien and Robert E. Howard. To take a game explicitly designed for such settings and thematic considerations and attach it to the gothic romanticism typical of the literature late eighteenth century, as the authors sought, required a thorough revision of the game system and setting. Even though there is no inclusion of gunpowder weapons and technology remains medieval, Ravenloft is separated from the standard Dungeons & Dragons universe: "Castle Ravenloft now lies lost within the Ethereal Plane, in the Demiplane of Dread" (p12, Ravenloft: Realm of Terror, 2nd edition, 1994). The Demiplane itself is 'alive', in the sense that it will grow and change according to those who exert their (invariably evil) will upon it, but it also acts as a prison: "In every instance, the lord receives tremendous powers from the land, but it is a place in which he or she is condemned to remain forever" (p15 ibid), on occasion its mists drawing touching other planes of existence and drawing in new individuals . The only opportunity for escape is at the time of a Conjunction, when part of the plane *merges* with lands in other planes.

In terms of the game system, the special abilities of Paladins is significantly reduced, and indeed they stick out like a sore thumb; they lose their power to detect evil (they can detect chaos instead), their protection from evil is reduced to a -1 modifier, and a lord of the demiplane is immediately aware of their existence. Rangers lose their ability to control animals that are under the obedience of a demiplane lord. Priests discover that their ability to turn or destroy undead is reduced and significantly so at "sinkholes of evil". Nonhumans are treated with antipathy by locals, with reactions lowered one category. Only the noble rogue professions are largely untouched. A significant number of spells, both divine and arcane, are modified to suit the realm, along with various magic items – indeed these modifications make up the bulk of the text relating to the realm. Spells which require connections planes obviously require modification, various alignment detection spells simply do not work along the moral axis.
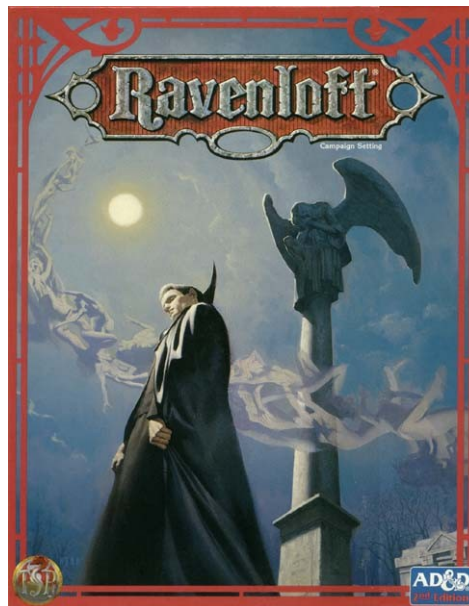
A substantial number of spells and items require a "Ravenloft Powers Check" which occur "when a deliberate, calculated act of evil is committed" - this includes graverobbing, time-honoured profession amongst most adventuring parties! Particular acts have a percentage chance of attracting the power of the plane, which provides both benefits, but with an aesthetic or other cost that clearly indicates the moral direction of the character. A random table is provided, but it it strongly recommended that the characteristics generated are merely indicative of the sort of punishments and rewards provided. For example, a Paladin who flees a battle, leaving his companions in danger will, if they fail a Ravenloft powers check, find that they have an enhanced movement rate – but only if they run on all fours, like a dog. The acquisition of "rewards" from the Realm can become substantial, eventually turning the character into an appropriate creature of darkness (vampire, lycanthrope etc) or even a lord of the realm themselves.

The Realm includes system elements to incorporate the style of the gothic; in particular fear, horror, madness, and setting-specific roleplaying elaborations for curses. A useful distinction is made between fear and horror, the former representing immediate threats, the latter revulsion. For fear checks, the characters must be faced with an active force which presents an active, imminent and overwhelming danger (or at least the PCs think so). Failing a fear check is just like being affected by the spell of the same name. In contrast, failure of horror check can generate a variety of reactions; aversion, revulsion, obsession, rage, shock or fear. Recovery is a lot slower, typically a month, whereas recovery from fear is a few rounds after the cause of fear is removed. In certain (very vaguely defined) cases madness saving throws are also required, with potential insanities resulting by random determination; notably the game – and not for the first time – describes multiple personality disorder and erroneously calls it "schizophrenia" (p36 ibid).

GURPS Horror

As a universal system with a particular emphasis on "reality-checking", GURPS has approached the horror genre is a setting-independent manner in a general sense with some inventive scenarios and setting supplements in a specific sense. The Flight 13 scenario. for example, included elements of GURPS Space and GURPS Horror, whereas the Cthulhupunk setting book adapted the Cthulhu mythos to cyberpunk. Theme specific rules sometimes made their way into specific setting books, in particular those adapted from other RPGs to GURPS, such as GURPS Werewolf: The Apocalypse, from the White Wolf game of the same name. It is notable however this is the exception rather than the rule; GURPS did not generally incorporate thematic elements into horror rules, nor for that matter, to most other genres. By being generic it does not usually apply genre conventions.
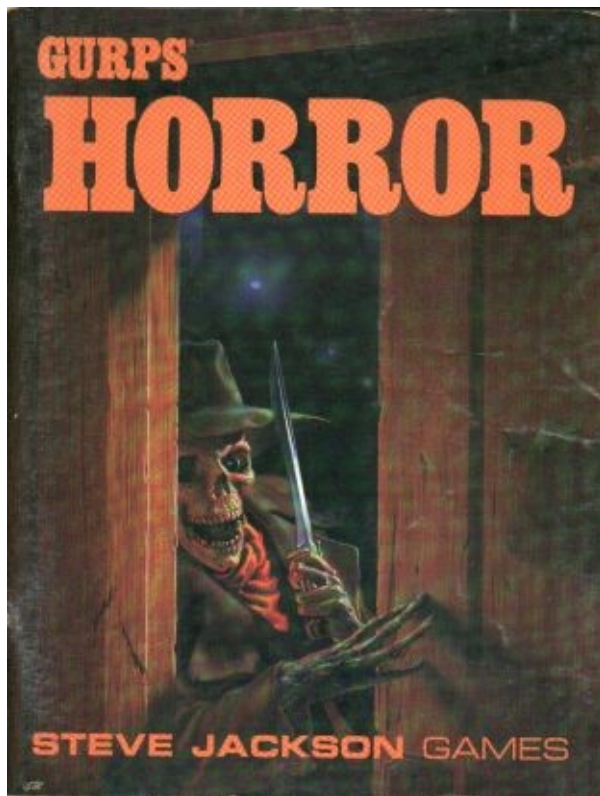
With the publication of the first edition of GURPS Horror by J.M. Caparula and Scott Harding (1987) GURPS acquired specific rules for dealing with the genre-specific conventions of horror – such as being scared. These were incorporated in the third edition and fourth editions of the rules. Before looking at the rules for being afraid, it is worth pointing out however that GURPS, in all editions, has provided for characters being quirky, delusional, phobic of a great variety of things, obsessive, manic, & etc., in a graduated manner as part of character generation. With a character point build system, mental disadvantages such as various forms of madness provide bonus character points that can be spent elsewhere, the values ranging from mere quirks (twitchy at the sight of spiders, -1 point), weird delusions ("squirrels are messengers from God", -5 points, example from p24, 2nd edition), to highly dysfunctional problems (demophobia, -15 points).

In some cases these mental disadvantages can be overcome by Will rolls; typically a test on 3d6 against a character's IQ attribute (10 being average, normal range 8 to 12), with the advantage/disadvantage Strong/Weak Will providing bonuses depending on the level that the character has this ability. Will rolls are also used for Fright Checks, with modifiers based on how terrifying the experience is, circumstances ("heat of the battle" provides a bonus of +5) etc. The actual list of proposed modifiers is very slight, especially compared to the detail that GURPS

goes into for other matters, although as a rule of thumb if a character encounters the subject of their severe phobia, the modifier is -4 to the Will check. If the Will check is failed, then 3d6 is added to the amount the Will check was failed by. This is then cross-referenced to a "Fright Check Table" generating a variety of results; most of the low-level results will stun the character for a period of time. Higher results (17 plus) can result in the character fainting, panicking etc., or acquiring a new mental disadvantage (22 plus), falling into a coma, having a seizure etc (28 plus).

Kult

Originally released in Sweden in 1991 by Gunilla Johnsson and Michael Petersen, Kult presents itself as a contemporary horror roleplaying game that seemingly derives from both the thematic elements of the World of Darkness series and some of the design features in GURPS (such as advantages, disadvantages etc). One key element to the game is the notion of "mental balance". In Kult, each character has 1d5 advantages and disadvantages, of varying point values. These values are not game-ratings, but rather are used to calculate the character's "mental balance". Characters with a positive mental balance start to gain advantages such as intuition, empathy, immunity to possession, and ultimately complete bodily control – along with the psychic inability to become aggressive or use force. Characters with a negative mental balance are considered to be unstable, disturbed, mentally ill, psychotic etc. In both cases extreme versions will encounter their opposite, their shadow. To make matters more challenging, the option exists to go "beyond humanity", gaining a variety of supernatural powers – but with serious mental limitations, as the various powers do not count towards mental balance. Pushing the limits even further in the course of the game the ability to manipulate space and time, to have one's physical shape altered, and to even affect – or infect – reality depending on the path taken. The paths of mental balance, and their physical effects, and reaching an "awakened" state is the core theme and narrative trajectory of the game system.

When character's experience a terrifying event, a roll-under test is made against the character's Ego, a core characteristic, with a moderate list of modifiers (a positive modifer is added to the roll, and is therefore 'negative'). A character who fails the Ego roll goes into shock; either screaming, weeping, fainting, running away, or going into catatonic shock. This however, varies according to the mental balance of the character. Those with a positive mental balance can shrug off the shock, or ignore it entirely. Those with a negative mental balance will be more affected and their disadvantages may come into play. Those with very low (i.e., seriously negative) mental balance values will suffer physical changes when they go into shock.

Magic is very important in Kult and is a special example of the themes considered in this article. There are six magic lores in the game; Madness, Time & Space, Dreams, Death, Passion, and (Altering) Reality. Each spell is described in fairly detailed terms of the gestures, requisite protective circles, invocations and mental visualisation that the spellcaster must engage in. This is not unlike the famous "verbal, somatic, material" components required in Dungeons & Dragons, but notably the spells listed typically are of ritual length, requiring several hours for casting. It is in the magic section that the first hints of the setting can be found; a world ruled by a malignant demiurge, holding humanity in captivity; a captivity which includes the illusion of death. The setting, whilst rich, is not incorporated in the game system itself.

Little Fears

Jason Blair's Little Fears (2001) caused something of a stir when published, due to the subject matter – the player characters are children confronting their fears; the monsters of Closetland, such as the Bogeyman, Titania, Baba Yaga, the Defiler etc. Although expressed as metaphor the reality of these childhood monsters is fairly explicit, an the author's citation of FBI statistics along with helpline 'phone numbers for missing children in the introduction and conclusion left little to the imagination of the not-so-hidden meanings behind this game. The reality of children in Little Fears is very different to that of the rational adult world. Whilst characters have the standard "stats" that one would expect from an

RPG (Smarts, Muscle, Hands, Feet, Spirit) of importance here are their Virtues; Soul, Innocence and Fear, which reflect that different reality.

Soul is the child character's essence; it can be destroyed by the magical attacks of the creatures of Closetland leaving behind an empty shell of a person. It can be regained through difficult tests of faith (in anything). Affecting both the physical but more the psychological realm, a child who loses soul gradually becomes pale, scattered in thought, forgetful, and weak-willed. Innocence is the connectivity that a character has to the fantastic reality of childhood, a world where stories and make-believe have psychic and corporeal form. The monsters of Closetland are attracted to children of a high Innocence, the feed upon it, and destroy it in the process. Innocence is lost as a character becomes more worldly-wise. This can be through the process of aging (99% of people aged 13 plus have no Innocence) and experience (especially abusive experience). A character with zero Innocence is "Blind" to childhood reality. This is not expressed as a gradual change in terms of game mechanics – although it should be! Finally, the Fear "virtue", is a number representing how close the child is to madness due to a succession of frightening experiences. On one hand, a frightening experience can cause immediate shock, as determined by results on the "Don't Be Such a Chicken" table. These experiences may cause Fear points to accumulate, which gradually lead the character into madness; brief, but correct, descriptions of schizophrenia, manic-depression and multi-personality disorder are provided.

Trail of Cthulhu

Trail of Cthulhu (2008) uses the setting of Call of Cthulhu, described by author Kenneth Hite as "the greatest RPG of all time" (p6) and attaches the 'Gumshoe' system developed by Robin D. Laws. In the Gumshoe system the investigative narrative is provided additional impetus; plots will not be derailed because an investigator missed a clue or failed a library use check. In Gumshoe, assuming character's make it to the appropriate location, they will find the necessary clues (and perhaps some additional ones), however it will be up to the investigators how they interpret the clues. Another feature of the system is that ability ratings are a resource in their own right. With a dramatic flow largely absent a highly skilled character cannot simply use their skill over and over again.

Two measures are used in Trail of Cthulhu to reflect psychic states. Stability is a short-term measure that can decrease rapidly during an investigation, but also refreshes rapidly. Sanity, on the other hand, decreases slowly as the character becomes more aware of the awful truth of the mythos, and rarely improves. The distinction between the two is necessary, not just to accentuate the difference between fear and loathing, as Ravenloft (op cit) does, but to explain how some thoroughly insane characters can have the outward appearance of stability and vice-versa. A typical value for both these abilities is around 6-10. For every three full points of Stability a character must name a person who is a "source of stability", a "person who keeps you sane when the terrors of the world threaten to shred your psyche" (p18).
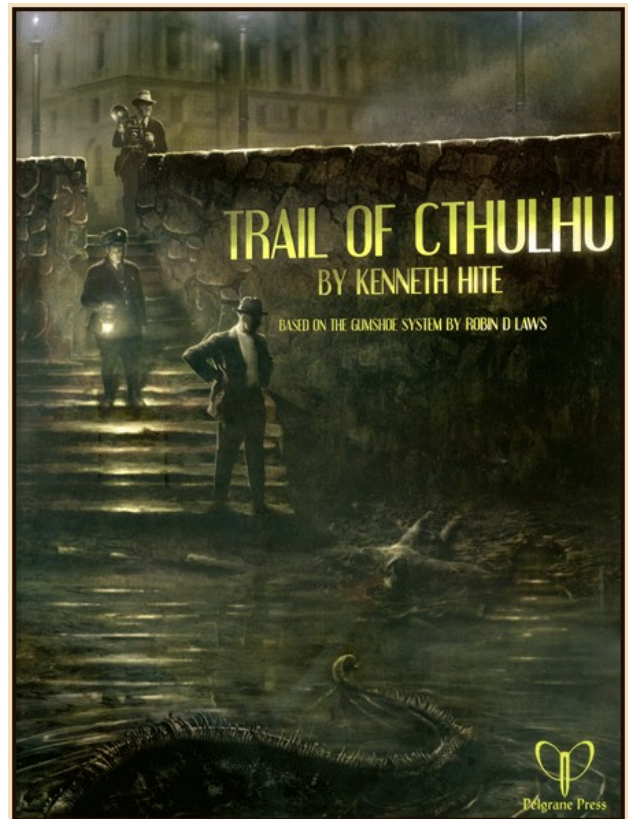
Stability losses are due to sudden and shocking experiences or witnessing, ranging from viewing a corpse (1 point loss) to actually killing a source of stability (8 point loss) (p71) if a Stability test is failed. Like other tests in the game, it is possible to spend resources to improve one's chances – like hit points, it is possible to spend oneself negative; if your character absolutely *must* cast a particular spell and is prepared to send themselves over the edge to do so, then so be it. Characters who resist their Drives, another psychological trait in the system, also suffer a test against their Stability. Stability loses have visible effects in terms of immediate loss (twitching with a 1-2 point loss, babbling adrenaline shock at 7-8 points) and absolute score (shaken at 0 to -5, utterly unhinged at -6 to -11 and possibly developing a permanent mental illness, and incurably insane at -12 or more). Stability can be recovered by psychological triage or by gaining confidence in one's abilities through a series of successes.

As a mirror to Stability, for every three full points of Sanity a character selects "a pillar of Sanity", an abstract idea, cause etc., of human concern. Sanity losses occur either by using the Cthulhu Mythos ability or by suffering a Mythos-related shock to Stability (down to negative values). For every three points lost to Sanity the character's belief in one of their "Pillars of Sanity" crumbles. Rather than suffer Sanity losses a player may decide that their character faints in the face of a Mythos shock (thus only receiving a -1 Sanity loss) or, if all records of Mythos influence on an event are destroyed, then the character can cover up within their own mind that the truth (and receive a delusional mental illness – such as selective amnesia - instead).

In Summary....

The mechanics of fear, horror and madness can have a subtle experience in the way that these stylistic elements are experienced by the players in the course of one or more gaming sessions. Incorporating a theme to the mechanics (e.g., Call of Cthulhu, World of Darkness, Kult, Little Fears) is one method. Introducing a graduated character experience of mental decline contributes significantly to the sense of creeping loss (e.g., Trail of Cthulhu, Little Fears), especially when this is conducted with strong aesthetic connections (e.g., Ravenloft). Differentiating between the suddenness of fear and mental instability in contrast infective disease of horror and insanity adds to narrative (e.g., Ravenloft, Trail of Cthulhu), as does displaying accurate knowledge, albeit in game terms, of a variety of mental illnesses (e.g., GURPS Horror) or the way they were and are treated (e.g., Call of Cthulhu, Trail of Cthulhu). Utilisation of the same, or similar, system mechanic for fear, horror and madness (e.g., Chill) ensures ease of application in actual play, allowing players to concentrate on the experience with the rules – if consistent, plausible etc., - to "fade into the background".

Because reviews are meant to provide at least some evaluative remarks in the course of this analysis, I find that the mechanics of Trail of Cthulhu most satisfying overall. They are sufficiently similar to the rest of the game system, they are nicely differentiated between stability and sanity, with additional character elements (drives, sources, pillars) that are simple to introduce to actual play. Ravenloft deserves a particularly honourable mention for managing to bring a game with a radically different focus within the standards of gothic horror with relatively minor modifications for the rules as writ. It also had an explicit standard of differentation between fear and horror and, on occasion, graduated systems of transformation. On the more disappointing end of the spectrum, GURPS Horror, despite having various mental disadvantages as a core part of the game system rules and character generation does not provide a very effective or plausible system for the development of new psychological problems and nor is the "fright check" system a particularly integrated and modular component to the ruleset. Despite having good integration with the rules, the Willpower checks for fear in Chill are minimal with little in terms of lasting or even temporary effects. Despite the name, the game mechanics (that is, not including some interesting scenarios published for the game) do not evoke a sense of dread. To reiterate; establish tension in the mechanics, establish graduated sources and effects both lasting and temporary, and incorporate the mechanics in a manner consistent with the rest of the game system.

INTERVIEW WITH RUSSELL BAILEY

Russell Bailey is a new name on the RPG design scene, and yet is already making quite a mark with a prolific emphasis on horror games through the White Wolf line. Over the past three years he has been a co-author of no less than ten products including: Urban Legends (2007), Damnation City (2007), Midnight Roads (2008), Fall of the Camarilla (2008 Historical Rome Vampire), Kiss of the Succubus: Daeva (2008), Lords over the Damned: Ventrue (2008), Geist: The Sin-Eaters (2009), and Hunter: The Vigil (2009). He's currently White Wolf's developer for the Vampire: The Requiem line. He also writes on RPGs, video games, and love at http://blog.fantasyheartbreaker.com. *We are delighted to be able to ask Russell a few questions about writing in this genre.*

Thank you Russell for agreeing to participate in this interview. Can you start with telling us how you became involved in role-playing games and in particular writing for White Wolf?

"Well, those things happened quite some distance apart. I got involved with hobby gaming with Battletech in the late eighties, and various roleplaying games after that. The first published games to make a big mark on me were Vampire: The Masquerade first edition and the Dungeons & Dragons Rules Cyclopedia. I blogged a bit about this on Fantasy Heartbreaker (http://blog.fantasyheartbreaker.com/2010/04/01/little-hearts-like-the-one-in-me/).

"I got involved with White Wolf completely the wrong way. I posted an actual play on RPGnet called 'Never Let Go' (http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?t=198667). It was a story about desperate youth and desperate love and desperate hunger, and Justin Achilli thought it was cool. He passed my name on to Will Hindmarch, who hired me to write part of Urban Legends. (I think this was actually 2005-2006, because Urban Legends took a long time to come out.)

"I'm told this is absolutely the worst way to get into the industry and I should never recommend it. So, of course, I hired Benjamin 'Bailywolf' Baugh on the same basis almost immediately when I became full time at White Wolf. So I don't really know what *I* recommend.

"I was the developer on the EVE: Exiled roleplaying game, and then moved over to developing Vampire: The Requiem halfway through the clan book series. Since I'd written on the first three clan books, it was a pretty natural transition."

You've had a very active career over the past few years, contributing to a large number of White Wolf products, both rules and story supplements. What was your favourite project and what are you working on at the moment?

"My favorite project was Kiss of the Succubus. Will and I had discussed me writing a clan book by myself, and I told him I wanted either Daeva or Nosferatu -- my two favorites. I wrote pitches for both of them, based on conversations with Will (the Vampire developer) and Rich Thomas (the creative director). The basic idea behind Kiss of the Succubus was that the Daeva got written off by a lot of players as 'sex kitten' characters. In years past, the White Wolf approach would have been to try and undermine that, show how it's all a carefully constructed front for a canny political conspiracy, what have you.

"We wanted to take the opposite approach -- embrace the archetype, show how it's cool to be a Daeva, and also why they're absolutely terrifying. I saw this piece of art in a student show once… it was a fetishized female body, but there were all these dotted lines and labels… a butcher's blueprint. And I was like 'that's how the dead see the living.' This was a book about going to all the best parties, leaving with the best looking guests, and draining them dry because otherwise you won't see sunset tomorrow.

"Well, that, and all the relationship baggage I could steal from the people around me. A lot of people's ex-boyfriends are in that book. Mine certainly included.

"I've been delighted to see the fan community working out the mysteries in the clan books. They've gotten so many of the secrets riddled out, but there are a few more…

"Right now, I'm working on The Danse Macabre, which is kind of the third part of a trilogy: the Vampire core, Damnation City, and The Danse Macabre. We're going all out on this one… massive, full color, huge quantities of roleplaying content, sample campaigns, new systems for Humanity, new take on something that hasn't been seen since the Requiem core book. It's *massive*, and I've been thrilled with the writers' work on it.

"I've also done a lot of work as a designer on EVE Online and on White Wolf's next virtual world."

… And Hunter received a number of nominations for the 2009 ENnie awards, including Best Rules, Best Supplement and Best Product....

"Mostly down to Chuck Wendig. I did a big chunk of the book, and I'm very proud of it, but that book was made possible by a really strong vision from Chuck and Justin."

How about Fall of the Camarilla, the fantasy-historical chronicle set in Rome? Was there a great deal of intermingling of historical and esoteric research in that product?

"Oh, Jesus, yes. Fall, and particularly Rome, involved massive amounts of research across multiple historical eras. We were tasked not just with writing those books, but essentially with rebooting the Vampire line. Doing Rome involved creating a lot of backstory for the clans, for the Camarilla, for the Kindred condition across history, and all of that was laying groundwork for the clan books, the Ancient books, and so on.

"I'm proudest of the work we did with the Nosferatu and Mekhet. The Mekhet, particularly, had a really loose identity before Rome, so we recreated them as the Seers, and that really stuck. If you look at Wood Ingham's brilliant Shadows in the Dark, that's a book we could only have done after we created the Rome series.

White Wolf has a fairly unorthodox method of game and story supplement design. Whereas most RPG companies tend to have a single person or perhaps a small group of developers, White Wolf tends for a much larger number. The image of herding cats comes to mind. Obviously it has a degree of success; would you care to discuss how White Wolf manages such large groups?
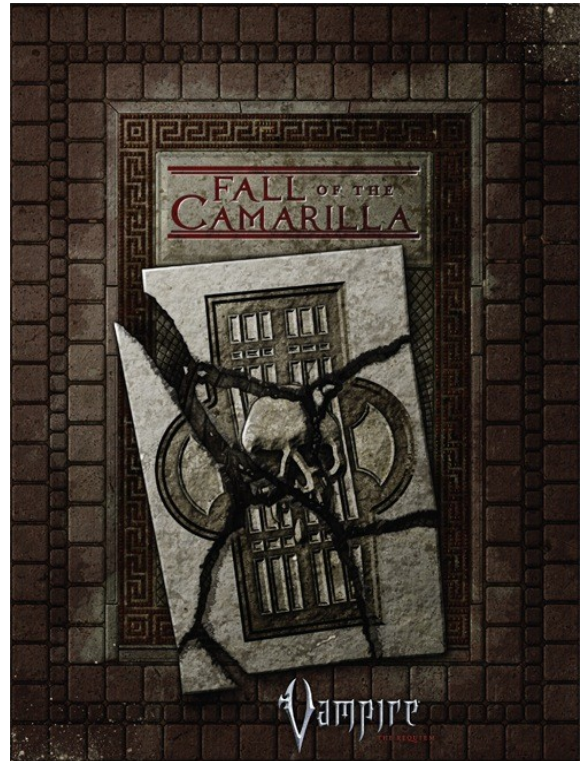
"The basic philosophy is: the right writer for the right chapter. As a developer, you write your outline with the team you want in mind, and then you try and get them all into place and working at their best. You really have to know who to go to… if I need blue-collar horror, I go to Chuck Wendig. Bad romance and ultramodern vampirism? Ben Baugh. Weird fairy tale? Beth Culp. It's a lot of that kind of team management."

The White Wolf line of products, at least for the New World of Darkness, is a fairly strong line that combines larger-than-life supernatural characters embroiled in their internal horror. This is clearly a formula with some success; do you have any thoughts on what is attractive about these themes? What do you think are the thematic similarities and differences between the material you've worked on (Spirits, Vampires and Hunters)?

"Spirits… spirits exist to highlight the themes of the player characters, simple as that. What that ends up meaning depends a lot on your individual chronicle.

"I always say that Vampire's about three things: what are you going to do to make it through tonight? What are you

willing to do to make it through tomorrow night? And what are you going to do until the end of time to make all of those things you're doing worthwhile?

"The parallels with hunters are obviously pretty strong. Hunters are, by definition, predators, just like vampires. It's just that they're predators by choice and cause, instead of necessity and temptation. So a lot of the same moral questions apply, but the guilt has a very different flavor. Vampires, Changelings, and Hunters probably have more in common than anybody else in the World of Darkness."

GBh -by Jensen

Nyeh, nyeh!

Git down here, ye foul spectre o' the Netherworld!

JEN '09

Character Concepts That Sound Really Cool When You've Had a Few Beers. But Suck Tremendously During Actual Play # 14:

THE DWARF VAMPIRE SLAYER

MOVIE REVIEW: AVATAR

by Andrew Moshos

dir: James "It's my world, but you can live on it" Cameron

The blue worlds in James Cameron's head

For a flick that cost over 300 million Earth dollars to make, I'm not sure that the investment is always visible on the big screen, be it 3D, IMAX or otherwise. Sure, this flick is already the second most successful (in unadjusted dollars) flick of all time just behind some other obscure flick James Cameron made fifteen years ago. But I can't really see whether it was worth all the fuss.

For three hundred million dollars, or closer to five, if you believe the sceptics who were hoping Cameron's hubris would be repaid with failure (who now console themselves by screaming "it's shit!" instead of "it's going to bomb!"), you'd think there'd be scenes of Scarlett Johannson, Salma Hayek and Penelope Cruz passionately getting it on in the altogether on the top of a diamond encrusted, plutonium powered aircraft carrier from which Cristal-sipping live killer whales covered in mink coats and platinum bling are catapulted into the sun.

You'd, or perhaps I'd, expect scenes where Johnny Depp dressed up like Imelda Marcos gets to punch Tony Blair in the face hard enough to knock teeth out, and shotgun-armed blows off the heads of the recently reanimated corpses of Charles De Gaulle, Ronald Reagan and Baroness Margaret Thatcher. I know that Maggie, as of this date (12/1/10), ain't dead yet, but it's hard to tell sometimes. At the very least, she hopefully doesn't have long to go. Sure, so none of that really could be expected to occur for real in a film costing nearly half a billion dollars to make and market. The thing is, though, for all that money, this flick provides scant justification for its decadent budgetary excesses.

All that money went to feed the Mexican prostitutes, maids and nannies of the CGI programmers who animate probably the least live action – live action flick to have that designation thus far. The humans are pretty much the only real stuff on display, with CGI being used in virtually every single one of this 2 and a half hours plus flick. And, sure, it's in stereoscopic ultra dynamic Technicolor 3D at selected cinemas near you. And yes, most of the time it looks impressive. Thing is, though, these kinds of flicks look impressive until the next all-CGI extravaganza comes out. Then they look clunky, no matter how many billions were spent. Within a few years they seem as forced and as stiff as a 90-year-old guy with a Viagra-induced erection. No, I'm not saying it's an affront to God Itself or at least to human decency. And, yes, this point requires a spot more discursion on my part to explain what I'm talking about.

Whenever new Pixar flicks come out, they look phenomenal. Three, four years after the fact, they're still beloved flicks, even if they looked state of the art upon debut. What keeps them solidly beloved by all/many are the stories and the characters. Monsters Inc and The Incredibles looked most excellent in the day, but now the textures and rendering techniques used to create them look positively quaint. State-of-the-art in movies becomes passé so quickly. Avatar is definitely state-of-the-art, with the latest cinematic technologies which will shape what happens in Hollywood for the next decade or so. The story, though, and most of the humans bar one, are so hokey and conventional that you wonder why Cameron bothered having any dialogue at all, or any actual people. Why not just have scene after scene of 3D shit fucking other 3D shit up for four hours? Surely he would have ended up with the same box office result?

I say that because I can't imagine anyone ran home after seeing this and bellowed to their friends / families / pets / pimps / drug dealers / girl they keep chained up in the basement: "It's the single greatest film ever made! And the greatest story ever told, with awesome characters and a plot I couldn't predict from the first second of screen time. Once it puts the lotion on its skin, I'll let you run down to the theatre to see it a million times!" No. Except perhaps for a few ten year olds, and some lonely, middle-aged strange people, no-one ran home, sent a text message or posted on the tubes of the internets anything beyond "It looked pretty amazing."

That is incontrovertible. It does, for most of its length, look pretty amazing. I'm not going to dispute it. By the same token, I'm not going to rail against it either, because even if its Noble Savage / Pocahontas / Dances with Fluorescent Wolves shtick is hackneyed bullshit of the highest order, it still didn't make watching this a painful experience. Utterly predictable, yes, and painfully familiar at almost every point, I still enjoyed it. As much as I think James Cameron and the screenwriters, if there were screenwriters, and it wasn't just a script spat out by Cameron's Cliche-O-Matic machine that he somehow got from a future ruled by Skynet, need to be punched in their ovaries for making the Na'vi so close an analogue for Native Americans – American Indians – whatever the fuck you want to call them in these post political correctness times.

It's embarrassing to see, at first, as to just how excruciatingly simplistic the alien species is depicted as being. It's a mishmash melange of 70s Gaia – the planet is one living organism - bullshit, blended with the Lion King, mixed with tearful Iron Eyes Cody looking back over horrendous environmental destruction with a tear running down his cheek, with other even more painfully shallow aspects. As a method of gaining sympathy / reparations for what happened in the Americas, it's got all the nuance and empathy of one of those tobacco store wooden Indians.

Honest Injun, paleface. And even when it was less embarrassing, it was still pretty embarrassing, because for all that it cost the annual GDP of a South American country to make, the rendering of these noble savages, who literally connect to the sentient and conscious planet through a USB port in their tails, much of the time they all look like they've been airbrush / spray-painted onto the side of a very large van.

This van is so large that it's a planet. The planet is called Pandora. Stuff floats on Pandora because of this stuff called unobtainium, at least, the humans who want to Manifest Destiny their way into the planet call it that. The company that wants to strip mine the planet has an enforcement arm which is either the US military or mercenaries on loan from the military. But they also, probably for PR purposes, have some noble scientists as well, who want to make friends with the 10-foot-tall blue, reptilian locals. Being scientists, and not military types, they want to give the infidel Na'vi schools and education and build them roads and such, and then convince them to voluntarily walk away from the places the company wants to mine.

To this end, the research arm of the company designs these remote operator Na'vi bodies in order to infiltrate the locals, teach them English, get them addicted to sugary sweets and alcohol and then presumably kill them off with AIDS-infected blankets. The wily natives, though, have no need of blankets, since they're reptiles, and it's a jungle-type planet. By necessity, a grunt (Australia's Own Sam Worthington), is dragooned / volunteers to become an operator / infiltrator for one of these Na'vi bodies, hence the avatar aspect of the title. Lying in something that looks like a tanning bed, his consciousness gets to be projected into this specially grown body.

But here comes the first conflict: though the scientist types, led by Sigourney Weaver begrudgingly accept him, Jake Sully has another master, being the top military chap onsite. Colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang) is the single greatest military stereotype in a film since Robert Duvall's Colonel Kilgore from Apocalypse Now and R. Lee Ermey's drill sergeant from Full Metal Jacket had hot gay sex together and made this guy as their baby. The good colonel expects Jake to supply him with the intel necessary to destroy the blue meanies, regardless of what touchy-feely bullshit the scientist types expect.

It is not, for me, an understatement to say that his presence in this flick was very welcome and very enjoyable. Compared to the lacklustre human portrayals throughout the length and breadth of the rest of the flick, he was a breath of fresh, scalding, vicious air, and I loved him for it. He's an actor that's been around for a very long time, who is probably the only person I'm happy for in terms of Avatar's great success. That he is now getting a serious payday and appreciation / acknowledgement after a lifetime of paying dues on the stage and screen is some kind of justice. I remember him as far back as the gay union leader in Last Exit to Brooklyn, and he was great there as well, and he was probably the most memorable character as one of the guys who got Dillinger in the recent biopic Public Enemies.

On Pandora, he's happy to give Pattonesque hoo-rah speeches intended to motivate his mercs in their desire to eradicate the local population, but he's also happy to strap on a mobile suit of armour himself in order to fuck shit up the old fashioned way. Some of the film's more darkly sardonic moments come from his actions, such as the casual, coffee-sipping way he oversees catastrophic destruction, or the determination with which he tries to kill people he doesn't like even when his access to oxygen has been cut off. Pandora, you see, doesn't have an atmosphere breathable by humans, which is another reason for the remote control bodies. And another reason why our hero Jake has to get into a native body in order to go native. And, goddamn, does he go native, in a long line of stories stretching back centuries, from Local Hero to Man Called Horse.

When he gets separated from his scientist keepers, he meets the chief's daughter, and then the rest of the tribe. Only time will tell, as he learns their ways, whether they will accept him, whether the chief's daughter will fall in love with him, whether the military types will brand the Na'vi as terrorists and try to wipe them out with a sustained campaign of Shock and Awe (TM), whether he'll fall in love with their natural / spiritual ways, whether he'll give a rousing speech commanding them to rise up against their colonial masters, and on whose side he will fight in the final battle. I mean, I couldn't possibly have been able to predict every single goddamn thing that was going to happen, because I couldn't possibly be as smart or imaginative as James Cameron, could I?

Yes, it looks amazing, and yes the action sequences, as these blue Indians go hunting the native wildlife and apologise to their prey as they kill them, and these blue Indians ride horse-like creatures and shoot arrows from their bows, looks like a million bucks. Several million bucks, in fact. Pandora looks like a real, believable place, at least during the day when it's not all glowy like one of those cheesy and very kitsch fibre optic ornaments that you used to plug in that changed colours and all. The action is solid, the explosions are very explosive and it's all lovingly rendered in 3D.

This is, after all, a film that was conceived of and constructed entirely with 3D photography and 3D projection in mind. Not the kind where small sections of the flick seem like stuff is flying out of the screen in order to smack you in the face, which is the cheesy kind we all remember with zero fondness from the 1980s and beyond. This is the film for which rinky-dink cinemas around the world, even the pretentious artsy-fartsy arthouse near my place, installed costly 3D projectors in order to be able to screen this flick in all its glory. In other words, to see it properly, you have to wear those plastic glasses for over two hours and twenty minutes.

Two hours and twenty minutes… that's a long, goddamn time to have those heavy things perched on the bridge of your nose. I can't imagine what it would be like for people already wearing glasses; I can guess it might be irritating. Mighty irritating. I also can't imagine whether other people will like it, which is why I only ever say to people who ask about whether it's worth seeing: "Uh, it looks great, the story's pretty stupid, though." Maybe I'm being too hard on the flick, maybe I didn't think that Worthington was that good a fit for the character, or that perhaps Cameron chose him specifically because he wanted a non-name in the lead in order not to outshine all those shiny visuals. So he settled on a virtual unknown with a fairly flat delivery style in order to never risk being upstaged by actors again. After all, it's all about Cameron being the King of the World. His mistake, from that perspective, is that Stephen Lang, even as the villain, breathes real menace and humanity into the proceedings, in direct contravention of Cameron's intentions.

Sure, the Gaia / Eywa stuff perhaps isn't too egregious, and sure, Sam and Zoe Saldana do decent voice work and motion capture work as the central couple in order to bring their Na'vi characters to life. The Na'vi do look like real beings, as real as their flying dragons and neon tribal / hip primitive ways allow them to look, and than in itself is an accomplishment. It's easy deriding the noble savage bullshit, but that doesn't invalidate the central aspect of the plot that looks at a science fiction setting for another application of the appalling legacy concept the United States gave the world in the form of Manifest Destiny. Sure, plenty of nations and civilisations were despoiling peoples and raping indigenous cultures well before the Mayflower docked at Plymouth, but the concept of being justified by God and necessity was never as chillingly and succinctly summarised by a two word phrase. It's a concept that deserves elaboration, exploration, repudiation and violent deconstruction. I just don't know whether you can treat the concept with any worthwhile seriousness even with hundreds of millions of dollars at your disposal, when you're James Cameron putting out a 3D flick through 20th Century Fox.

I just wish Cameron had some ideas for dialogue or dramatic complexity that couldn't effectively be encapsulated in a single text message. Visual stylist he might be, one of the most successful directors of all time in terms of box office he certainly is, but the man who made a Terminator cyborg sinking into a pool of molten metal give the audience a thumbs up at the end of Terminator 2 is still a juvenile hack of the highest order. Remember that as you queue up to see the latest shiny thing in a long, unending line of shiny things.

7 ways in which tomorrow's shiny things always make yesterday's look like crap out of 10

"Outcast. Betrayer. Alien. I was in the place the eye does not see. I needed their help. And they needed mine. But to ever face them again, I was going to have to take it to a whole new level." – this terrible bit of writing / narration brought to you by the genius (?) James Cameron through terribly superfluous narration delivered in a wooden style by Sam Worthington in – Avatar.

OLD CTHULHU HAD A FARM

by Erica Hoehn

Old Cthulhu had a farm... Iä, Iä .. Oh!

And on that farm he had a Deep One... Iä, Iä .. Oh!

With a splish-splash here, A splish-splash there

Here a splish, there a splash, Everywhere a splish-splash

Old Cthulhu had a farm... Iä, Iä .. Oh!

On that farm he had a Flying Polyp.. Iä, Iä... Oh!

With a whistling here, a whistling there

Here a whistle, there a whistle, Everywhere a whistle-whistle

Old Cthulhu had a farm.... Iä, Iä .. Oh!

On that farm he had a Servitor... Iä, Iä... Oh!

With a piping here, a piping there

Here a piping, there a piping, Everywhere the pipes were piping

Old Cthulhu had a farm... Iä, Iä .. Oh!

On that farm he had a Shoggoth.. Iä, Iä... Oh!

With a *tekeli-li* here, A *tekeli-li* there

Here a *teke*, there a *li-li*, Everywhere a *tekeli-li*

&etc., conclude with.. Iä, Iä, Oh..! Cthulhu! Cthulhu! F'tang F'tang!

LORD ORCUS LISTENS: SPRING 2010 AD

by Lord Orcus, Esq. (with assistance from Steve Saunders

Greetings, hapless mortals! It's been quite awhile since I've entertained myself in these dark waters. Sure, there're reasons for that, but Lev agreed to more Circles of Willis for my pantry, so here I am. How have you been these last few months? Well? Not well? I actually don't really care. I only ask because my human slave-being brought it up.

For those of you too pathetic to not be in The Know, I'm Lord Orcus, and this is my column. People write to me with questions and I give them the most definitive answer possible on or in at least 267 planes of existence. But enough with this crap. Pleasantries are for the weak and players of vampire LARPs. On with it!

Demon From Another Land,
We fear the Lunar's Crimson Bat. If we set you against this beast, who will win?
Tarkhan, western Prax

I'll win, Tarkhan, and I'll tell you why: **Science**. It simply defies reason that I would have any problems with any Crimson Bat of any kind. Now, Plutonian Platypi-- that's a different story.

Dear Orcus, you shaggy, hairy, smelly thing you,
My friend Chloe says you have a big magic wand that will make a bell ring in my stomach. I want to know more.
Emily, Class 11A [school withheld]

Why, yes, Emily, I do! Not only will it make a bell ring in your stomach, it will also lay eggs which in turn eventually hatch into undead Thri-Kreen. Tell you what, I'll stop over by your school, let's say, next Monday? See you there! And be sure to clear your calendars for the next six weeks.

Dear Orcus,
Our Manx cat, Manannan Mac Lir, pays a great deal of attention to our Thursday night gaming session. He especially enjoys watching dice roll. Often he collects them after a session and hides them in various parts of the house. Should I buy a copy of third edition WHFRPG because it has such cool dice? Could I use the box as a litter tray?
Erica, Victoria

Erica, the fact that the box makes a good litter tray may be the only reason to buy the new Warhammer Fantasy "Roleplay" system. Maybe it should be called "Rollhammer"? Anyway, I hear you can buy the dice separately, so I strongly suggest that route. Then you can have your kitty playing with some (admittedly) cool dice AND play something much better, like WFRP 1st or 2nd ed, Tunnels & Trolls or Alpha Omega. See? Even D&D 4th edition will do in a pinch… because playing WFRP 3rd is like plying D&D 4th… *recursively*.

What? No, I haven't played the new Warhammer RPG yet. But! As I've complained before, hapless fools, I have all the 1st and 2nd edition books… why piss all over my hard won booty so soon? Seriously, that Marienburg book was a real pain to find!

Oh, and Erica? Love your cat's name.

Dear HD Vision Monthly,
I'm thinking of buying one of the new HD televisions. Should I buy an LCD or plasma?
Rian Bacon

Huh? HD Vi-- Goddammit! Steve! Are you drinking all the rum again?? For the love of— you just can't find good help these days… especially when one's life becomes a giant cliché Which is cliché all unto itself… which is— Steve! I will bury you ALIVE.

But to answer your question, Rian, I say go LCD. Less worries for you now that I have made the choice for you; and with that settled you can take up a nice life of cannibalism. You have the perfect name for it, after all.

Dear Orcus,
Our local university is claiming all room space and the Student Guild is unable to help us. We didn't hold an AGM last year. Could you make an appearance at Murdoch University to spice things up a bit?
Concerned Citizen of MARS, Murdoch, Western Australia

Why, of course, Concerned Citizen! Just contact Steve and he'll let you know what my "speaking and eating" fees are. Yes, I can be paid in rare dice and/or miniatures. In fact, if you can find any Franco-Prussian War or Second Punic War specific minis, I'll be happy to cut out the speaking and get right to the eating. I may require some cases of hot sauce, though. Please keep that in mind. Wow, I'm getting hungrier already!

Lord Orcus,
How do I become the next Lord Orcus?
Andrew, age 7

Baby steps, Andrew, baby steps. I suppose the best way to start is by asking you this question: How many baby hearts do you own? The first baby step is the most important. Get back to me and we'll talk… I could use a fresh, young go-getter who doesn't mind scourging that worthless layabout Steve.

Dread Lord,
Are you watching *The Legend of the Seeker* TV series; and if so, how do you like it?
Bob, No Crossbow

No.

Dear Lord Orcus,
I have two questions, if you don't mind, Great Lord: 1) Do you think that Wizards [of the Coast] will change their position on PDFs and make legal ones available. With so many 4th edition books out, having to carry them all is a pain, but I like to do things legally. 2) What is your favourite flavour of soul? I'm bringing some snacks to a potluck you're attending.
Nuclear Wizard

Well, NukeWiz, PDFs are the future, and the future is right mindflaying now, because you are reading this very magazine in PDF format! Sure, I love me a musty tome from the times of yore, but these days I do more and more gaming stuff on my laptop. Even with my immense strength, carrying around a huge sack of books can be tough. Normally I have to employ henchmen and/or undead (but usually undead henchmen) to carry everything. These days I find it much, much easier to have said underlings just purchase and download electronic copies of the books I want. Making notes and find things in gamebooks is less irritating now, too. Flipping through pages of rules has never been more pleasing now that I have a "search" function to use. But will WotC change their position? I don't know. I mean, weren't they releasing a lot of 3x edition books and old TSR material through great companies like DriveThruRPG? Though I guess the 4th ed books can all be found through their D&D Insider thing. Don't you pay a membership fee and gain access to all the rules in all of the books or something like that? I mean, if that's the case, that's not so bad. Some people swear by that sort of thing, I hear. However, some individuals (like, say, me) would rather have the books themselves, in both hardcopy and e-format. All very tasty food for thought. I'd like to see folks out there get what they want as consumers, but I'm sure that illegal downloading has cut into the business end a bit. I suppose it all breaks down to what is becoming a new consumer model: Give the companies you love money. It's kinda like the old model, but this one is more direct in that you take your hard-earned ducats and you WANT to give the money to the companies you'd like to support, as opposed to simply purchasing items from them because that's the only way to acquire said items… does, uh, that make any sense? Support your hobby or watch it perish. Pompeii? That city refused to support it's gaming hobbies and so I took great delight in using a local volcano to punish it verily.

Mmmmm… souls. To answer you second question, NukeWiz, I like mine spicy, and heavy on the chipotle, garlic, Danish citizens and bacon.

Great questions, mortals! And if you… hey, what's this?

Dearest Lord Orcus,
Will you ever return my phone calls?
Kali, that gal you met two weeks ago

Oh, dear. Please… leave me alone. Please? How did this get through the filters? Steve, is this your fault? I think you

Ιэμ βαχκ φορ τηε ατταχκ, ταστψ μορταλσ!

It's all Greek to you, right?

might be spending too much time with a certain person of the female persuasion. Man, I swear, you're released into the wild and trying to get you to pay attention for more than 3 seconds is like trying to negotiate a bar tab with seventeen ADHD afflicted kobold/beholder crossbreeds.

Er, anyway, thanks for tuning in to another instalment of LORD ORCUS LISTENS. Remember, I love to hear from you! Please send in any questions or heart-eating concerns to orcus@orcusville.com and I'll be sure to address them in my next column.

Oh, yeah! Before I go, have you seen Hackmaster Basic's *Frandor's Keep* yet? Ye gawds, what an excellent product. And you don't even have to be playing Hackmaster, as Frandor's Keep can be used as a resource for just about any fantasy RPG. It has be getting all nostalgic for those Necromancer Games and Judges Guild books like The *Bonegarden*, *Bard's Gate*, *The Wilderlands of High Fantasy*, *City-State of the Invincible Overlord* and *City of Brass*.

Okay, okay, I suppose those books aren't that old, and I'm sure it's a total shocker that I'd plug Necromancer Games, but if you love gaming stuff with lots of detail, adventure seeds and backgrounds, you need to make Frandor's Keep yours NOW. Go to www.kenzerco.com right now and see for yourself, dammit.

So, yeah, I have some specially bred Acheronian poodles to fry up in some of this special low-fat extra virgin's blood olive oil I picked up. Until next time, keep it unreal—OR ELSE.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

A Traveller Retrospective: Classic, 2300AD, Megatraveller, New Era, T4, GURPS and Core ... GURPS Infinite Worlds and Time Travelling … Cyberpunk and Transhumanism … Blue Planet ... Star Frontiers and Revolt on Antares … The Terran Trade Authority … Frank Chadwick Interview … and much more!